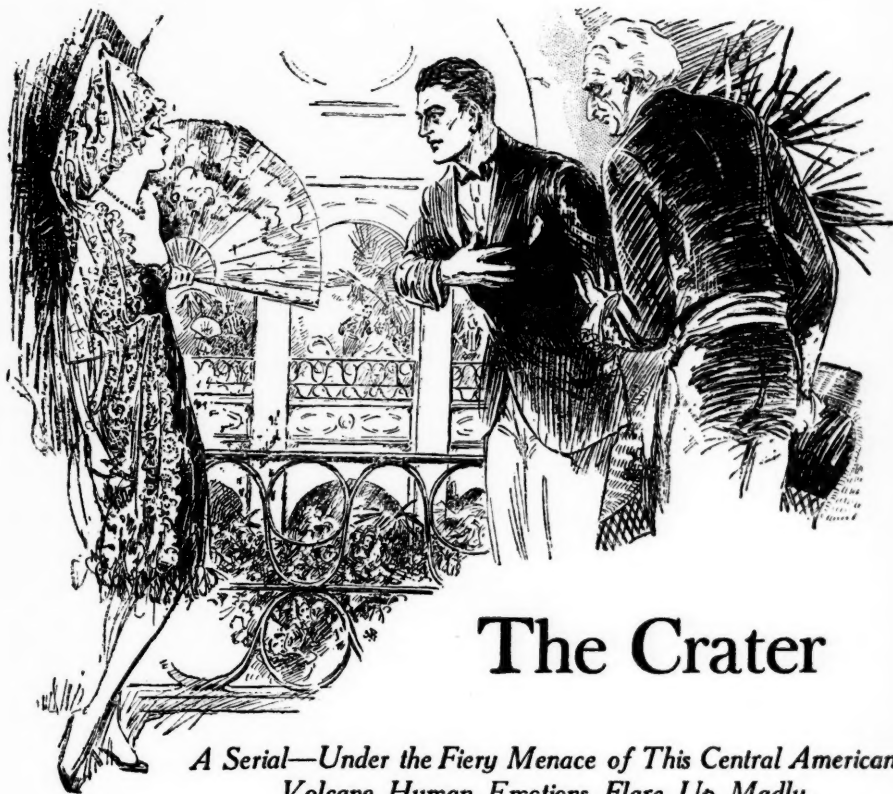


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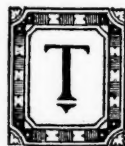
*A Serial—Under the Fiery Menace of This Central American
Volcano Human Emotions Flare Up Madly*

By Kenneth Perkins

Author of "Queen of the Night," "The Starlit Trail," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE CASINO



HIS is the way life goes at Todos Santos:
You find yourself in a glorious setting of moonlight, fireflies, booming surf, palmettoes, marimba music, tinkling glasses.

You meet a girl with jet black hair and blacker eyes, with flowered shawl and jeweled comb. You dance with her once.

Before the dance is over you have sworn eternal love.

Some one lurking on the other side of the fountain in the *patio* sees her put her flashing, gold-hued arms about you and kiss you fiercely.

A knife whizzes out from a bower of orchids and oleanders. It misses your shoulder and you draw a gun and fire. A man in velvet jacket, red sash, and trousers with pompoms down the sides, falls out on the flagstone.

You escape out of the country on a freighter. The *señorita* goes into a convent.

Or perhaps she comes back the next night for another dance with some one else.

At the Casino of Todos Santos, the upper class gathers to dine, dance, and play at roulette. Coffee and sugar planters, exporters of sisal, cochineal dyes, gums, and fine feathers; army officers, officials and their wives—these are the characters you meet.

Señor Hidalgo, a tall, sinister figure with a mane of snow white hair and a lean, bronzed face, was in the habit of coming to the Casino every night with his beautiful daughter.

After dinner he would permit her to dance in the ballroom, while from a seat on the gallery he watched her behavior. His glittering eyes and sharp hooked nose gave him the appearance of a vulture. He seemed to be waiting with the hope that some one would be knifed in a brawl, so that he might feast on the body. Lovers that were too ardent had been knifed out there in the *patio* more than once.

It was, as I have said, the way life went in Todos Santos.

The volcano over there beyond the Barrier Reef puffs up a mild cloud, gives out a warning thundering "retumbo" from its throat, and every one expects to be drowned in lava. They are alive to-night, but they may be dead at sunrise. So they live fast.

The pop of champagne bottles, the whirl of roulette, the tinkle of the fountain, the soft voices of Spanish lovers, the rhythmic shuffling of feet to the syncopation of a gourd. Here are girls with grotesque tortoise combs and gorgeous shawls and luminous eyes. The

men have yellow faces, horse mane hair, evening dress. And always that old vulture up there on the gallery dominating the scene that describes the Casino of Todos Santos—which, translated, is the "Gaming House of All the Saints."

One night while the alcalde was at his usual place, sipping a glass of Montilla, two young American gentlemen presented themselves to him.

One was of athletic proportions with black hair and gray eyes. He offered a letter introducing himself as Daniel Gregory, and his companion as Tertius Gregory, his younger brother.

Señor Hidalgo looked up from the letter at the two men.

The younger brother, he observed, had restless blue eyes and an oval face: the face of a boy scarcely out of his teens. He looked back at Daniel. Daniel was a very handsome Americano—even from the Latin point of view. The white-maned Hidalgo nodded, and a thin, cautious smile came to his mouth.

"Yes, I can see it!" he said. "You are like your father."

He asked them to sit down at his table.

"A great man, your father. Made a fortune here. And you two have come to make your own fortunes?"

The elder answered: "My father advised us not to stay."

"Ah, señors. Too bad! We need American capital to develop our resources. Without it we can do nothing. Your father seemed to have his fingers on unlimited money. He is still influential in your Wall Street—so I read."

The two travelers nodded. "He wants us to see Central America—and to be sure to go home," Daniel, the older brother, said, and Hidalgo replied:

"I would be only too glad to get you a position here. I have schemes by which I could make millions, if I were only connected with Wall Street. A plateau of mahogany over there—" He pointed out of the window to the

moonlit Sierras.

"But we need a railroad. A forest of bananas and cocoa down there—" He pointed to the palm fringed coast. "But we need a landing place for freighters. If I could entice you to stay only a week or two—"

"We sail in an hour or so," Dan said. "The steamer will warn all passengers by her whistle."

The old hawk flushed. He seemed to take a personal grudge at their refusal to consider this international trade alliance.

"Well, then—" He shrugged his shoulders. "An hour or two of dancing or of cards. Which shall it be?"

"Cards," the younger brother answered readily, his blue eyes roving restlessly toward the gaming room.

The old Spaniard called for the proprietor, introduced him to the two American guests, and asked him to take Tertius Gregory to the gaming room and show him every possible courtesy.

Dan was able to get in a word to his brother before he left:

"If you're going to gamble, stay sober. And don't object to their cards. Or their etiquette either. They're bad losers. You remember what we heard on board ship. They all carry knives."

"And I'm carrying a six-shooter," Tertius said.

"Which you better not use, unless you want to find yourself taken prisoner by a bunch of those barefooted tramps out there in the street who call themselves soldiers. Remember the skipper said they'll shoot a man just for the fun of pulling a trigger. It's the way they become corporals—killing their first victim."

"Don't worry about me, old devil," Tertius said. "Worry about yourself. There's no telling what this vulture will do to you." With that he was gone.

"And now, *señor*," the "vulture" said, when Dan returned to his table, "I want you to meet my daughter."

He sent a Chinese waiter downstairs to summon Doña Dolores. Dan had a glimpse of a gorgeous barbaric creature down there on the dance floor, a sort of cockatoo with a jeweled comb.

She came up immediately in response to her father's summons.

"My daughter, Dolores; Doña Dolores they have called her since her mother's death."

She was a strange sort of beauty: gentle, extremely effeminate, yet with a skin that reminded Dan of molten lava. He was in the "volcano country," and this woman was the embodiment of it.

She looked up at him, her velvet lashes dropping when her eyes met his. She looked down at the buttons of his blue coat, at the flannel trousers, at the white pipe-clayed shoes. Then she ventured another glance over the tip of a jeweled fan.

He thought he saw a glimpse of the volcanic fire that was her life blood. It sent a queer thrill through him.

"This young Americano is not like others," Hidalgo said. "He is of a fine family—"

"That I could see, before you told me," the girl said in the studied English accent she had learned at her convent school.

"I knew his father very well. Built the railroad from here to San Luis. A great engineer; a gentleman. Unfortunately bad politics forced him out. But he didn't go without wealth."

Neither Dan nor the girl were listening. They were looking at each other.

The guitars and marimbas struck up another dance, to which one of the players, scraping a notched calabash, added a barbaric syncopation. Gregory and Doña Dolores went down to dance.

Although all eyes were upon them, they became isolated in their own particular drama. A very handsome Americano dancing with the daughter

of Señor Hidalgo—that was drama enough in itself.

Gregory felt that he was being beleaguered by many unseen forces: the drowsy air which was of the temperature of his blood, the perfumes that were like an opiate, the exotic girl looking up to him with a fierce adoration which was convincing and devastating, even though it might have been counterfeit. They know how to flirt so well that their most obvious flattery rings true.

"Are there any other Americanos up there in the States that have hair like yours?" she asked.

"Plenty of them. They aren't all blondes."

"But is it as silky?"

"That I don't know."

"Are there others with the color of your eyes?"

"I dare say."

"But do they look like the bores of two guns?"

"I didn't know mine were that way."

"As if you were holding two guns at me, demanding my life."

They talked like that not only on the dance floor, but out in the *patio*, where they were free of the stares of the dancers, the guests, the proprietor, the Chinese waiters, the marimba players.

Gregory felt a mesh being spun around him. He was fascinated with the girl's beauty and with the melodious, whispering croon of her voice. But he knew well enough that it was the momentary fascination that a traveler has for any exotic detail he might chance on in a strange port—a woman, an intoxicating drink, a haunting rhythm, or an opiumlike flower. His senses were excited, and all the hectic life of this distant seaboard seemed to be incarnated in that ravishing creature.

The sea wind was singing in broken cadences, woven together into a song by the breakers beyond the reef; as

the scraping of that gourd wove together the wailing Spanish *triste* so that it became a definite rhythm which sent a pleasing thrill through Dan's very bones.

He must watch out. He was thinking now of living a life of feverish pleasure in some mountain hacienda given to him by Señor Hidalgo. A life in a hammock, a Carib serving him iced drinks, another fanning him, another playing a guitar. A life with this woman whose blood was not human blood, but fire and brimstone.

The mesh that had closed about him took the form and substance of fragrant, shadowlike hair pressed against his cheek. The girl's arms, encouraged by his own avowal of delight and rapture, were entwined for a violent moment about him, then her two hot, jeweled hands were buried fleetingly in his hair.

Yes, he must be on his guard, against himself. What if he breathed to her that this was the highest peak of his existence beyond which he could never go—even in Paradise itself? Would she take it as any woman at a summer dance? Or would she believe it?

She was very young. She looked perhaps nineteen. Take off two years because she was a Spaniard and lived in the tropics. That would make her seventeen. To make fervent love to the seventeen-year-old daughter of Señor Hidalgo—that might lead to trouble.

Gregory collected his wits. He was not ordinarily a self-indulgent man. He could bridle himself. He was a chip of the old block, which in Hidalgo's words would mean that he was every inch a New York financier.

"I better find out what my brother is doing. You know he has a habit of getting into trouble. Montilla sets him on fire. The little *hermano*—is that what you call a 'kid brother' in this country? Well, I'm beginning to worry about him."

It is a way that unselfish people have of saving themselves from their

own humanness, I mean, by saving others. Once he thought of his brother, in there gambling with strangers, half-breeds, he felt for a moment liberated from the fond witchcraft of Doña Dolores.

But she said: "When we go in we will have to join my father. Don't go in for a moment. I want to say something. I mean I want to ask something. Not from you, but from the gods. From the volcano gods out there on the horizon—" She pointed to the crater of *El Capitan*.

"What do you want to ask them?"

"To give us another moment—together—like our last, only greater."

"How could it be greater?"

"If the lava of *El Capitan* encompassed us while we are in each other's arms."

The proprietor, Señor Alvarado, a monkey-faced little gentleman with gray hair and a silk ribbon on his spectacles, hurried out to the *patio*, wringing his hands.

He ran this way and that, darting his eager glance behind ferns, palmettoes, flower arbors, the fountain. He was like a ferret in a frenzied search.

"Oh, Señor Gregory! Señor Gregory!" he called in a soft, excited voice.

Dan Gregory remembered now a detail in that feverish dream which at the moment of its occurrence had completely escaped him. Now it welled up from his subconscious self. He had heard a gunshot—at the very moment that Doña Dolores had thrown her



A LIFE OF FEVERISH PLEASURE
WITH THIS WOMAN OF FIRE

arms about him.

It was a shot muffled behind the thick walls of the Casino somewhere in the direction of the gaming room.

Dan Gregory leaped to his feet, leaving the fragrant arbor and darting out into the moonlight.

"Here I am. What's happened?"

"Softly, *señor*. We must keep it hushed up. You are alone?"

"My partner in the dance—" Gregory said, motioning to the arbor.

"Then come here. She must not hear this. *Señor*, I am at a loss. I am undone. I—"

"My brother—" Dan cried, feeling a deadly pang go through him.

"Yes, *señor*."

"Not killed—"

"No, *señor*. Trust him for that. He could take care of himself. A very good man with a gun—a good shot—"

"What the devil are you saying?"

"A brawl, *señor*—with one of the players."

"And quick—what in God's name—"

"Your brother, *señor*, has killed one of my guests."

CHAPTER II

THE ELDER BROTHER



DAN GREGORY staggered back as if he had received a blow. One hand against an adobe pillar, the other at his forehead, he remained there, dazed.

In the ballroom the marimbas and that infernal scraping of the calabash were still leading the dancers. Doña Dolores, innocent of everything but sheer rapture, was in the arbor waiting for her partner to come back and entangle himself deeper in her charms. The fireflies, the gorgeous tropic moon, the gentle rustle of dry palm branches, the thrilling boom of surf beyond the Barrier Reef—these details distilled a pervading ecstasy in the air.

But young Tertius Gregory had killed a man.

Dan heard the soft, excited whisper of the proprietor who was gripping him by his two arms.

"We must not lose our heads, *señor*. Men kill themselves over their losses in there; but we must keep the matter a secret. They get drunk and kill each other, and we say nothing to the dancers. My house, you understand, *señor*, must not get a worse name than it already has. You help me, and I help you. You understand that?"

"You'll help me—you'll help the boy get out?" Dan asked eagerly.

"But wait. Some ass of a waiter has already called the constabulary. The doors of the gaming room have been closed."

"Then let the boy get out," Dan pleaded. "Let him get back to the steamer. I'll stay here, and account for what has been done."

The proprietor shook his head. "That, unfortunately, *señor*, cannot

be! The constabulary are strict and eager. An *Americano* has killed one of our rich planters. A serious matter, *señor*."

"Good God!" the elder brother cried desperately. "What's to be done?"

"Dismiss your partner, *señor*, and then meet me here."

Without betraying a word of the tragedy, or the anguish within him, Dan Gregory returned to his partner, and asked to take her to her father.

"You will ask me for another dance, *señor*?" she said. "For more dances. For many?"

"Yes, I promise you."

They came to Hidalgo's table.

Gregory flinched under the predatory stare. Was it possible that anything could be hidden from the old man? He seemed to be reaching out with his clawlike yellow fingers into the young *Americano's* soul. Something, it was apparent, had happened. Had his daughter quarreled with the handsome young *Americano*? Impossible! She never quarreled with anybody. She was made for soft phrases, amorous looks.

Dan mumbled something brusquely, excitedly. He could not be diplomatic. He hurried away, and the Hidalgo looked questioningly at his daughter.

"He is worried about his brother," she explained. "I believe the *hermano* is drinking too much—like all these *Americanos*."

Dan found the proprietor out in the *patio*, pacing up and down, his fingers clenched together.

"Send for the American consul," Dan said quickly.

"The consul, *señor*, I regret to say, is in bed—utterly helpless in body and mind with malaria. It is for us to imagine some scheme."

"Take me to see the boy, quick! He must be in the right. Tertius wouldn't do this thing without cause—"

"It is true, *señor*." They crossed the *patio* to the wing of the house in which were the gaming rooms. "He

was in the right. He caught one of the players cheating. He accused him. Another drew a knife and threatened the boy. But the knife did not frighten him. He felled the man with a blow of his fist.

"The other player—the one who had been caught in the act of cheating—drew a gun. Your brother was quicker. He drew likewise. One shot. It got the rascal in the heart."

"Then he'll get justice, if I have to call the skipper of the steamer and his whole crew. Damn me if we won't blow this whole town up!"

"I advise a more diplomatic procedure, *señor*." They were at the door now, where a waiter and a ragged barefoot soldier with a huge rusty looking rifle were on guard. "By all means, *señor*," the proprietor whispered, "I advise that you entreat the boy not to attempt escape. These scarecrow soldiers are only too eager to try their marksmanship. 'The law of flight'—as we call it in this country—gives them the right to kill any man who resists arrest."

Dan Gregory found himself in one of the smaller gaming rooms. Evidently, following the usual policy of hushing such matters up, the body of the victim had already been removed. Two of the guests, a croupier, and the corporal of the constabulary squad, were in the room with Tertius Gregory.

Tertius was quite composed, except for the pallid face, the vehement puffing at a cigarette.

"It's all right, devil," he said, smiling at his brother's consternation. "I had to do it. They all know it. A clear case of self-defense."

"I know it's all right. You couldn't do anything wrong, Tish. Shake. You did the right thing."

"It might be best that you appropriate the gun," the host said in Spanish, turning to the fat little corporal.

"I have the Americano's gun, *señor*."

"But the other gun—that was drawn on him."

"I know of no such gun," said the corporal.

"In fact there was no such gun," said one of the two guests who had witnessed the incident.

"I was told that there was," the proprietor said, somewhat nettled.

"Who told you that?"

"One of the guests whom we advised to leave and stay out of the affair," said the proprietor.

"Then he must appear at the trial," said the corporal.

"The trial!" the proprietor exclaimed, wringing his hand.

"You mean we must execute this Americano without a trial?" the corporal exclaimed. "What a lunacy!"

"I doubt if he will appear anyway," said the proprietor. "Ordinarily these Creole gentlemen from the mountains do not like to remain in town and entangle themselves in some local affair. Particularly a serious one of this nature where an Americano is concerned."

"Good God!" Dan exclaimed. "You don't mean there will be any doubt as to the victim's having drawn a gun!"

"Of course there won't," Tertius said, still puffing fiercely at his cheroot. "Half a dozen men saw it."

"But they were all friends of the victim," the proprietor said, nervously fingering his topaz rings.

"There will be no trial," Dan said. "You'll frame the boy. I can see that." He was much more excited than his brother, for the simple reason that he saw further into the complications. "Who is it that's detaining this man?"

"I am," said the pompous corporal.

Dan looked down at him, his fists clenched. He had difficulty in restraining himself from tearing the pudgy, ragged little hombre to pieces.

He was barely composed enough to reflect a moment. He could threaten the little wretch. The fact is he could

nave shot up the whole crowd, he was convinced, despite the fact that they were all armed. Even the guests, who were standing behind the gaming table, casting complacent and deadly glances at the two Americanos, were armed.

The substance of Dan's simple and quick reflection was this: some one must be bribed. Just how much it would take, there was no telling. Dan had very little cash. His brother, having been trimmed already by the card sharps, had nothing. But he would make the attempt anyway.

"I want to see you alone, you—" he said to the corporal.

Then turning to his brother, he said—so that all who could speak English could hear and understand him, "Don't attempt to escape. They'll shoot you down, just for the fun of it. They're eager to have you try escaping. Remember that."

"I'm staying here, devil—till you tell me to go back to the ship."

"I'll fix it. Meanwhile don't worry."

The proprietor and the corporal followed Dan out.

"How much do you want?" the latter said abruptly. He was not in the mood for a long palaver.

"Is it possible you are offering a bribe?" the corporal said, his eyes bulging. "With the alcalde in this very house?"

"You mean Señor Hidalgo?"

"I mean Señor Hidalgo, the captain general of the seaboard, and the mayor of this town."

"He knows nothing of this," Dan said.

"And he shall not know," said the proprietor. "My house—"

Dan interrupted him. "I have two hundred pesos—not in your monkey money, but in American gold."

"A hundred dollars—in American gold?"

"Yes. Here it is."

The muddy eyes bulged again, with the usual respect that they have down in that country for American money.

But his pudgy lips trembled to a slow grin.

"It would be better to give it to a good lawyer," he said.

"Is a hundred dollars not enough?"

"No, *senor*."

"How much, then?"

"It is impossible for me to estimate how much my reputation with the lieutenant is worth. He has promised me a promotion if I make this arrest. If I fail I will be demoted. I do not wish to live on black beans and water all my life."

"I can raise five hundred, if you give me time to go aboard ship."

"I would have to divide it so that the lion's share went to those higher up," the corporal objected.

Dan was at a loss. Was the little breed merely shoving him higher? Or did he have hopes of greater reward from the kinsmen of the dead man?

The proprietor interrupted. "You are on the wrong scent, Señor Gregory. This man is of no importance. He will take your money, and his men will shoot your brother. That is their usual game. He wants more—as much as you can raise on your steamer."

Gregory was momentarily at a loss, then he said suddenly: "Who are these 'higher-ups' as he calls them?"

"The alcalde has the sole power over prisoners—to condemn them, to pardon them."

"Señor Hidalgo?" Gregory repeated eagerly. He thought he saw a rift of light in the darkness in which he was groping.

"Yes, *senor*. But it is of no use to go to him. He has climbed to his position as captain general, not only because of his family connections, but because of his ruthless justice. He cannot be bribed. He cares more for his family name, his reputation, than for a bribe."

"I'll go and see him," Dan said.

"It will do you no good. He will merely bid you to wait until the trial. Then the testimony of these men"—

he pointed to the door of the gaming room—"the men in there who are friends of the victim—their version of the incident will be recorded, and a judgment given." He began to wring his jeweled hands again. "A military trial, *señor*. Swift, inexorable. Can not something be done to avoid it?"

"Yes," Gregory repeated, starting off, "I'm going to see this Hidalgo right now."

"I advise you strongly, *señor*, that you do not bring him into this affair. There must be some other way. The disgrace to my house—"

"Confound your house—and its cheats and murderers!" Gregory exclaimed.

The proprietor had gripped him by his arm. "I beg you, *señor*. The *alcalde* is a stern man, a fanatic. His name. His anger. His—"

Gregory had evoked the picture of that old vulture seated up there—looking down at the puny mortals on the dance floor like a predatory gargoyle eying its prey.

"I tell you, *señor*," the proprietor was pleading fervently, "the *alcalde* Hidalgo will not help you. He has visions of being some day the president dictator. His judgments are inexorable. Only once did he show any mercy, and that time to a kinsman—a Spaniard. And ever since he has been all the more cruel in his judgments. Do not tell him of this. He will close down my house—he will—"

Gregory stopped him with an oath. The one passion of the bejeweled, bespectacled old proprietor was to preserve the dignity of his damnable "house."

He shoved the excited fellow aside, and then, on the point of turning to the *patio*, he paused, and said in a changed voice: "You say he did show mercy once?"

"Yes, *señor*; but to a member of his family, a cousin. Not to an *Americano*. It is ridiculous to suppose that—"

Gregory put up his hand. He stared a moment at the gray-headed proprietor in his elegant evening dress, then at the ragged corporal in his soiled shirt and buttonless blue coat.

They wondered just what it was that had caused the change on the *Americano's* face. Haggard, distracted as it had been, it seemed to light up with a new fire, an exultant hope.

Without another word to the two astonished men, he turned and fled to the *patio*.

As he crossed the flagstone path that led to the ballroom, the balmy atmosphere, freshened by the breath of the sea, took hold of him again, as it had but a short while ago. It was a drug that calmed his feverish brain and quieted his tortured nerves.

He took deep breaths of the spiceladen air like a man maddened with thirst gulping down water. He felt exhilarated, drunk, almost dizzy. The riotous music mingling with all the other exotic sounds of that seaport set his mind in a whirl.

There were two strange freaks of circumstance which made it possible for Gregory to face the crisis of the sudden drama. To save his brother—that was the primary duty. There was no sacrifice in the world that could be too great to accomplish that end. He would have given his life in his brother's stead. In fact, that was the course that first suggested itself to his mind.

But this could not solve the problem. No one wanted his life. The measly, unwashed little corporal cared nothing for Dan Gregory's life. All he cared about was the honor of making the arrest. If he had been offered a reasonable bribe, he might have contrived some means by which the prisoner could escape.

But then what was to prevent one of the privates from shooting him? Bribery was out of the question. Offering up a life was out of the question.

And, furthermore, it was not exactly necessary.

Dan had thought of another and a better way.

These flirtations at a seaport casino with an impulsive *señorita* were of short but violent duration. If they were weathered until the next morning, it is conceivable that the *señorita* and her lover might meet in the plaza and not recognize each other.

At least they might pass each other by without so much as a flutter of the heart. The volcano erupts and then settles down in its mantle of cold lava and ashes.

That describes Dan Gregory's love affair with Doña Dolores. He had sensed its intensity easily enough. An hour like that might result in a suicide or a marriage or a murder. Or else in a passionate and heartbreaking good-night with the probability that the morning would bring a very effectual awakening.

But for that simple little twist of circumstance—a brawl over cards—Dan Gregory would have returned to his ship before dawn, and Doña Dolores would have returned to her hacienda or her convent school, and neither in all probability would have met or thought of the other again.

But the brawl had happened. Dan's younger brother was to be taken to jail. He was to be tried in a military court. And tried by a fanatical old man.

Dan presented himself at Hidalgo's table on the gallery. Doña Dolores and her father were both seated there, the latter puffing slowly, intently at a black cigar, the daughter waiting restlessly for the return of her evening's lover.

Dan Gregory was not a man to beat about the bush. He had made up his mind as to the course to take. It was, in fact, the only course. Any man in the world who had a brother whom he loved would have done the same thing.

"Señor Hidalgo," he said with characteristic American assurance, "I

wish to ask you for the hand of your beautiful daughter in marriage."

CHAPTER III

THE BETROTHAL



ALTHOUGH he had been thinking all evening of the young Americano, and of the splendid mate he would make for the exquisite Dolores, Señor Hidalgo

heard these words as if in a dream. His beetling black brows were raised, so that the saturnine cast of his countenance was effaced, leaving the visage of an astonished and human old man.

He did not reply.

Nor did he move from his indolent, half recumbent position on the rattan chair. He was aware of the fact that his daughter had arisen and was standing behind him, her frail jeweled hand gripping his shoulder.

Perhaps she had been frightened at this bold Americano. But that made no difference. The request had been made of the alcalde himself—not of the daughter. The daughter of this Spaniard would have nothing to say about the arrangement of a marriage.

In the moment of tense silence during which the old alcalde focused his surprised and glittering eyes upon Gregory, a pandemonium of wild ideas must have gripped him. His face was like a mask carved in yellowed ivory. No man in the world could have guessed at the thoughts behind that jaundiced brow or those fierce black eyes.

"An Americano presuming to think himself worthy of my daughter's hand." That was the first thing he might have thought. "An Americano with good blood—and of excellent business connections. He is worthy in that one respect.

"An Americano who is handsome, strong, educated, well mannered, greatly admired by my daughter. But she is a foolish little child. She must not

choose her husband. I must choose one for her. It is the custom of my country and of my race. I know who is worthy of her."

Gregory saw his lips tighten. What was the old hawk thinking?

"This Americano with his fine air, and his nerve. Nerve enough to ask me for my daughter's hand in marriage when he has not known her more than two hours. That is the Wall Street urge in his veins. I am a Spaniard. I too will make up my mind immediately:

"He is an able man of affairs, if he has his father's talents. He will make good connections for me in the States, where American dollars will open up my mahogany forests."

Señor Hidalgo's flintlike eyes were burning. His thin lips were parted, showing a row of glistening teeth. It was one of the few times that Gregory ever saw him smile. Evidently Hidalgo had arrived at a decision.

"I am of Latin temperament. I admire his eagerness. I admire everything about him. He is like his father. And I told his father that if Dolores had been but a few years older I would have offered her hand to him in marriage. And here comes his son—built in his image. Sent by the gods—"

The old man arose, a towering, gaunt figure with his mane of snow-white hair. He came to the young American and put his scrawny hands on his shoulders.

"My son, this is a historic night. The Hidalgos welcome you into their clan. This night the blood of your Nordic race and the noble blood of the Hidalgos will join together as tributaries. This night—here and now—I will announce this glorious betrothal!"

He motioned to the orchestra on the dais below him to stop the dance.

All the guests of the Casino—the young dancers, the gray-headed coffee merchants, the exporters, the civil dignitaries, the officers of the constabulary, the waiters, the old dueñas at the

dining tables, looked up to the gallery.

There they saw the gaunt towering figure of their honored and feared alcalde, his arm upraised, a glass of wine in his gnarled brown fingers.

They saw the handsome young Americano, and the vision of scarlet silk and snow white mantilla and blazing jewels—Doña Dolores standing beside him holding his hand.

"I wish to announce the betrothal of my daughter Doña Dolores to Señor Daniel Gregory, the Americano!"

Gregory heard these words as if in a dream. He had had a definite doubt—born, perhaps, of his utter indifference to this undreamed of turn in the fortunes of his life, that Señor Hidalgo would not consent to the match. But there was the alcalde, the first man in the town, the first man of the seaboard province, speaking his name.

There were the upturned faces of those Creoles, respectful, incredulous, astounded.

He was aware of the pervading hush, the sudden contrast of the wind in the dry palm branches outside, the sharp, excited voice of the old Spaniard.

He was aware of the crowd below uplifting their glasses; of their faces illuminated slowly with an exultation. The romance of a stranger coming from the sea and winning a bride appealed to them. The suddenness of it was something dear to their Latin hearts. It belonged to that setting of sparkling wine and spice-laden air. They cheered. They drank again. The orchestra played the San Sebastian national hymn, and then it played the Star Spangled Banner. The scene became a sort of international ceremony.

And then Dan heard the whistle of the steamer off there at the seaside—hoarse, vibrating, importunate—inviting her American passengers to come aboard and sail home!

Dan darted a quick, pained look at the window. Behind the potted palms at the back of the gallery he saw the

proprietor of the Casino. He stood with one jeweled hand on his forehead, his eyes bulging behind the thick glasses, his lips wide open and displaying a mouthful of gold teeth.

Dan Gregory's brother was being held prisoner in that same house for slaying a citizen of the country!

Some one downstairs was making a speech.

It was a portly, gray-haired, brown skinned soldier, heavily laden with medals of all sorts. He was something of an orator, even though he was attempting to pledge a toast in a language which he had not mastered:

"Frands and countrymen!" he declaimed, holding his glass aloft and looking up to the white-maned figure on the gallery. "Señor Hidalgo, Señor Americano, Doña Dolores! I drink to you with thees remarks!" Dan did not hear his remarks, he left Doña Dolores standing alone for a moment, which was something of a breach. But it could not be helped. He must go back there to the potted palm and see the perspiring and frantic host.

"Thees union—" the bombastic voice of the old general down on the dance floor was shouting, "ees the symbol of our frandship between our great republic and the Americano's countree. The States, she are unite' with San Sebastian Libre! Ees an alliance internacionale."

Dan whispered a few terse and hurried instructions to the proprietor.

"We will tell Señor Hidalgo now!"

"*Por Dios, señor!*" the proprietor gasped. "You are a very extraordinary Americano!"

"But get this first: Hidalgo must think that you just told me of what's happened. You understand that? *You have just told me this minute that my brother has killed a man.*"

"Carramba! But never in all my days have I seen so clever an Americano!"

The declamation contest on the dance floor was at its height. The gen-

eral was mounting to a tremendous climax of oratory:

"Ees one glorious moment from the life of our history. A young Americano taks for his wife our most be- love' heiress. From now on let San Sebastian Libre and the States be close together in frandship like man and wife. I drink—we all drink—to the health of the bride and groom!"

Again the music, Yankee Doodle played on marimbas, syncopated with the scraping of gourds; the huzzas of men, the uplifting of swords, the flutter of fans and handkerchiefs, the tossing of flowers which *señoritas* plucked from their hair—that was the confusing medley of sound and scene.

And as an undertone of these riotous impressions, Dan Gregory was transfixed with the one thought: "My younger brother is being held for the slaying of one of them!"

Hidalgo came back to the table, his lean jaundiced face suffused with triumph and pride. He saw his prospective son-in-law standing before him pale, handsome, challenging.

The beetling black brows of the old Hidalgo lifted.

"You seem surprised, my son, at this outburst?"

"Something serious has happened," Dan began.

"I just now told him, Señor Alcalde," the proprietor gave out his lie nervously. His bulging glasses misted.

Dan interrupted:

"No. My brother—"

"His brother is in a little difficulty, Señor Alcalde." The host's jewels sparkled on the intertwined shaking fingers.

"His brother, *por Dios,*" Hidalgo said. "I had forgotten all about him. Why was he not here to drink to this betrothal?"

"He was at cards—" the proprietor stammered, "and—how shall I say it—he—"

"He caught one of the players cheating, and in accusing him a brawl

resulted," Dan said, as if he had written the speech out and memorized it. "They attempted to shoot him, but he was too quick for them."

"*Bueno*. I am glad to hear it. We San Sebastians are miserable shots. I am glad he got out of it. Very nasty things—these brawls. Sometime a man is knifed—or killed by some fool crazed with guaro brandy." He motioned his daughter to a seat, and sent a waiter to invite the general and some other of the more distinguished guests.

"Order a supper," he said to the proprietor who was streaming with perspiration, "an engagement supper. If the reporters from *El Heraldo* come, let them bring their cameras and so forth up here. But arrange a table with banks of flowers first. And order champagne and amontillado."

He turned to Dan Gregory. "Your brother? Yes, yes. Let him come here. I want them all to meet him. A fine young fellow."

"I wish to offer my brother's regrets," Dan said calmly. "It would be best that he return to the steamer."

Hidalgo flushed up heatedly. It was another one of his spurts of anger, of hurt pride. "Your brother leaves us when this is your betrothal feast?" His eyes blazed up. "Drunk, I suppose?"

"In protecting himself, he was forced to draw his gun."

"What, what! His gun! Did he fire it?"

"He did, *señor*," Dan said.

"And being an Americano he could not miss," Hidalgo said sardonically.

"No, *señor*. He did not miss," Dan said.

"And whom did he kill?"

"A sugar planter by the name of Bartolo Miguel y Cobija," the miserable proprietor pleaded.

"*Diablo!* Not the Cobija family of San Luis?"

"Of that same family, *señor*," said the proprietor. "But he is a black sheep, a card sharp who has brought shame to this house."

Doña Dolores clasped her hands and sank with a moan to her chair. "*Madre de Dios!*" she cried. "What is to happen now!"

"I cannot be bothered with this ill savory matter," the alcalde said. "Go and prepare the supper, as I ordered."

"Señor Alcalde," the proprietor begged, "something must be done. The constabulary have arrested him, and it is only by repeated pleadings that I persuaded them to wait until you had been told."

"What am I to do?" the old Spaniard shouted testily. "It is no affair of mine until the trial."

"Then shall I let them take the young Americano to the Presidio, Señor Alcalde?"

"No—that must not be, by Heaven!" the brother interrupted. "The disgrace of it. The disgrace to this girl. *He is to be her brother-in-law!*"

The alcalde's eyes darted to the frightened and trembling little figure, then back again to the ashen face of Dan Gregory.

"That is very true," he said softly.

"An unpleasant affair at best. A scandal. Don't let the reporters get hold of this. It must be hushed up." He sat down, wet his forefinger with his lips, and rubbed his closed eyelids.

"Let me see. The boy must not be put in prison. That would get in the paper. *Madre de Dios*, what a nuisance! What shall I do with him? Killed a Cobija! Well, I must explain to them—some other time."

"Meanwhile, Señor Alcalde—" the proprietor said humbly.

"Meanwhile, *por Dios*, if he were only out of the country!"

"Which can be very easily arranged," the brother said. "I need only order him to return to his ship. It sails to-morrow morning."

"Very good. Let him do that. And you"—he turned to the proprietor—"let it be given out that this rascal Cobija killed himself over his losses."

"There were witnesses," the proprietor said.

"They can be bribed."

"The constabulary—"

"Send whoever is in charge of the detail to me."

The corporal was brought immediately. In fact, he had been lurking behind the potted palms waiting for a chance to bully Dan Gregory into a bigger bribe.

Hidalgo looked up at the corpulent, shabby little hombre. "You have arrested an Americano by the name of Tertius Gregory."

"I have, Señor Alcalde, for the murder of one Bartolo Miguel y Cobija."

"He did not murder him. Cobija murdered himself. Report that when you return to the Presidio."

"I will do so, Señor Alcalde."

"But before you return to the Presidio you will order your squad to escort the said Americano back to his steamer."

"I will do that likewise, Señor Alcalde."

"And if any harm comes to his person, you are responsible."

"I will be responsible, Señor Alcalde, for his very life."

"And to safeguard him further, you will let him ride in my cab. And four of your soldiers will march on either side of the cab until it is driven to the end of the pier where the steamer is."

"I will obey every command to the letter, Señor Alcalde."

With that the corporal brought his tremendous shoes together, the run-down heels clicking. Then after a salute which was a sort of a bow and a salaam combined, he turned and marched away.

With his eyes focused on the shock of horse mane hair, the back of the faded blue coat, the pudgy legs waddling away, Dan Gregory felt as if he had awakened from a hideous dream.

He turned to the alcalde with the intention of excusing himself from the

"engagement supper." He wanted desperately to see his brother again and to take him in his arms.

But the problem was a ticklish one. The alcalde was thinking only of the betrothal. That young Americano in his teens had nothing more to do with the matter. The quicker he was out of the country the better.

"And now, my son, now that we have disposed of that matter, will you sit down?"

"I wish to bid my brother good-by, *señor*," Dan said respectfully.

Hidalgo looked up at him from under his savage tufts of brows, then he showed his glistening teeth in a smile.

"I quite overlooked the fact that you will be wanting to see him safe aboard."

"I may never see him again, *señor*," Dan said. "He is leaving this country for good."

"Quite so. You may ride with him to the pier. I merely make the request that you do not delay too long. We shall all be waiting for you. We can hardly have a fiesta unless both of the betrothed are present."

"I will return, *señor*."

Thus it was that Dan Gregory gave his word. He did not for the moment realize what that simple little sentence meant. "*I will return, señor*." He had made a promise. And the grim old alcalde was respecting that promise.

A light came to the old Spaniard's eyes—a curious flare that was at once threatening and majestic. He might have said:

"You will return. I know it. First because you are a man of your word. Second, because I command it."

Dan cast one parting glance at his fiancée. Doña Dolores, desperately fatigued, had lost all semblance of the fires that had burned in her beautiful body earlier that night. She was a frail, big-eyed, woebegone creature who looked more than anything else like some princess of the ancient Mayan civilization of that country who

was about to be offered up as a sacrifice to the gods.

She held out her hand to her betrothed. The latter stooped in a very successful attempt at Latin chivalry, and kissed it.

He had the impression when he lifted his head that the little *señorita* had stifled a quick yawn.

Of course that was to be expected. She was only a child. Her fires burned with volcanic ferocity—when they burned. After that, they were volcanic ash.

"Until I see you again, *señorita*—in half an hour."

"It will be an eternity," she answered in a tired voice.

Dan hurried down to the broad adobe steps of the Casino where the *alcalde's* carriage and eight ragged soldiers were waiting.

Tertius Gregory was just stepping in. The door emblazoned with the Hidalgo arms—a white shield with red cross and the sacred quetzal bird—was being held open by one of the Chinese servants of the establishment.

Dan was in a fever of impatience to tell his beloved and frightened young brother the glorious news. Tertius was free! He had escaped the jaws of what looked very much like a quick martial execution.

Dan did not know just how to tell him. If he told him the whole truth, there would be a scene of brotherly love, abject gratitude, sentimentality. Dan did not relish such conversations. Nor did his brother.

The truth, if it had been told, would have to be put in words something like this: To save his brother from an unjust imprisonment and a possible execution, Dan had offered to give himself up for life to a woman he did not love.

Imagine telling Tertius that!

Instead this, a characteristic and utterly unsentimental conversation, ensued:

"Just what's happening?" Tertius asked anxiously as Dan ran to the car-

riage and jumped in beside his brother. "Where they taking me?"

"To the steamer," Dan replied simply, as the carriage started to rumble down a narrow street.

"Looks like a trick. This squad of tramps."

"They're an escort to see that no one harms you."

"Looks fishy. Who in the world is so solicitous?"

"The captain general of this province," Dan replied. "The *alcalde* himself, who seems to have power of life and death over his subjects."

"Pretty white of him, I'd say. Thought he would side with his own countrymen in this damnable mess."

"He prefers siding with his own family," Dan explained tersely. "I'm going to be his son-in-law."

His brother darted a quick look at him. "Are you crazy?"

"I asked him for the hand of his daughter, and he accepted."

"Good Lord—what are you handing me, devil? You've been drinking too much *guaro*. It makes Americans with high blood pressure plumb raving."

"The fact is, I'm not going aboard, except to get my evening clothes. I'll need them for the wedding."

"Look here, devil—look me in the eye. What sort of a practical joke—"

"You'll find out, when the ship leaves. Go on home to New York. Tell them I've found my fortune."

"You mean you fell in love with that—that little *señorita*?"

"Of course I did. Why else would I propose?"

"What in the name of ten thousand tombstones!" Tertius could not finish. He gasped repeated oaths of incredibility.

His brother was silent.

They passed the cavernlike doors of the cantinas, curio stores, chandler shops of the water front. Above, the balconies, almost meeting each other over the narrow alley, shut out the moonlight. The two brothers could not

see each other's features.

Tertius was still gasping. "I'll be a caterwopous son of a sea cook!" he exploded finally. "There I was mixed up in a confounded rotten brawl with these breeds, while you were in the *patio* making love to the town heiress!"

He slapped his knee and burst out into a hearty youthful ringing guffaw. "I just about get myself executed by these ragged scarecrows while you pick off the prettiest and richest girl in the country. Pretty soft!"

"That's the answer. Pretty soft. A life of ease under the palms. The breakers booming and a marimba band playing, a retinue of mozos to wait on me the rest of my life, a hammock, and iced drinks—"

"Pretty soft!" the boy laughed. "Look here, give me your hand. Shake! I'm congratulating you."

They shook hands. Tertius's grip was vigorous and enthusiastic, the grip of a strong youthful hand. Dan shook it in a matter-of-fact way, revealing nothing of the intense yearning that was within him—a yearning to sail home.

The gangplanks were being withdrawn as they drove out on the pier. The banana conveyers had been shunted off to a side track by the switch engine. Trains of empty fruit cars were drawn up along one side of the pier. The big white steamer, heavily laden with her cargo of sisal-hemp, coffee, bananas, and mahogany, was ready to stand off.

Dan had just time enough to go aboard, pack up his grips, and come ashore again. Every sound, every clank of windlass, every cry of deck hand casting off the mooring lines, went through him like a pang, a heart-rending call to him to stay on board and sail home.

A last grip of his brother's hand.

"You lucky devil!" Tertius said. "If I could only stay here with you—instead of going back to the States!"

"Better take your medicine like a man," Dan laughed, hiding his own

feelings. "Stay away from this country. You pretty near got it in the neck! We were ashore two hours—and you pretty near got yours!"

"A good time, I must say!" the boy chuckled. "I get attacked by a couple of card sharps and then escape a firing squad. And you get married. Blooey! That'll have to be cabled home to dad and to the United Press. A good time was had by all!" He gripped his brother's hand, as the last ladder was about to be hauled up.

Dan did not let go the hand. He seemed to fight with himself in the effort to release it. It did not occur to him that he could have stayed on board—and thrown that little *señorita* over. The thought was never born. It could not have been given birth in that mind. To give his vow to a young childlike, carefree creature like Doña Dolores, and then to double cross her. In his wildest dreams he could not have imagined such a solution.

No, he had chosen the game he wanted to play, and he could do nothing else but stick to the rules. His brother had killed a man for breaking a rule at cards. The respect for the rules of a game, any game, must have run in the Gregory family.

With a final effort he let go of his brother's hand, then turned and ran down the ladder.

It was only a few moments more before the white steamer had swung clear of her moorings, and was standing off into the lagoon.

Bathed in moonlight, churning a fountain of phosphorescence at her stern, white and immaculate, she presented the always thrilling sight of a ship putting out to sea. On the dock the stevedores, coolies, trainmen, water clerks, and the usual hodgepodge of humanity you will see at any Central American port on the dock, watched her going down the moonpath.

A track boss of the railway company; half white and half negro, from Georgia, United States of America,

was standing beside Dan Gregory.

"She's headin' for New Orleans—that thar ship—headin' for home."

Dan heard him, and the voice, even though it was the voice of a Dixie mulatto, thrilled him.

"Ah'd give up my job, and two hundred pesos, and mah wife and mah tin-roofed shanty, to be abo'd. Yas, suh!"

There was still no need for Dan to say anything. The voice was speaking for both men—for the well born New Yorker and for the mulatto from Georgia.

"We got to stay here with our stingin' ants and ticks and fever, and our yaller jack eatin' away our cahcasses. Yas, suh! And them lucky debbils! Sailin' home to N'Awleans! Oowah!"

Dan turned to the half-breed. He wanted to say something, but he knew the man could not understand. Instead he muttered something to himself:

"Thank God, the kid's safe!"

He then returned to the Hidalgo coach. He must hurry back now, and keep the promise he had made to Doña Dolores.

CHAPTER IV

THE LEECH



WHEN Dan Gregory opened the door of his cab he was confronted with the most extraordinary experience of his life.

It was partly due to his disordered mental state. The thick, pungent breath of many tropical flowers, the hypnotic lilt of the wind in the palms, and of the breakers on the reef, the two or three hours of adventure through which he and his brother had passed—all these factors had worked havoc with his senses. He was returning to Doña Dolores, very much in the manner of a man walking in his sleep.

As he was about to step through the door while the squad of scarecrows with their rusty old guns made a

parody of coming to attention, he was aware that a man was already seated there in the cab!

The moon, offering the only light, shot its beams through the opened door and fell upon a lean, pointed, ratlike face.

Gregory never forgot that picture. It was a sharply etched cartoon of humanity, a brown skinned *hombre* with narrow-set, cavernous eyes, two thin strands of a mustache that parted over sore lips and grinning teeth.

Yes, the fellow was grinning at him.

"Good evening, *señor*."

Dan stared open mouthed. He was fairly hypnotized by the sheer bestiality of that countenance. He might have jumped at the opinion that it was an optical illusion, except for the fact that he could smell the *hombre's* breath, sweetened with Jamaican rum.

"I believe you've made a mistake," Dan managed to say uncertainly.

"You have got into the wrong cab."

"Not at all. No mistake, I have the right man. You are Señor Gregory. Daniel Gregory, Americano."

"Yes, but—"

"Step in. Sit down beside me."

Dan did not obey. He stood there, clutching the edge of the open door, scowling as if against a painful light.

"Who the devil are you?" he asked.

"An invited guest—at the betrothal fiesta."

The stranger stuck his slender thumbs into his vest armpits and grinned insolently. "Thought we might ride together."

Dan was so taken aback by this effrontery that he could do little else but gasp an oath.

"We'll become acquainted while riding to the Casino. We must get to know each other. You'll see a lot of me during your wedded life."

"Good God!" Dan exclaimed in a voice that suggested something very much like horror. He let go the door and doubled his fists. For a moment he stood swaying, stupefied by a spasm

of anger. Then abruptly he shouted to the coachman, sitting up on his box like a bag of old clothes surmounted by a straw sombrero.

"Why did you let this drunk get into the *alcalde's* cab?"

"I gave him no permission, *señor*."

"Then why didn't you kick him out?"

"Kick him out, *señor*! The saints forbid!"

Gregory leaned into the door. The ill-savory wisp of humanity shrank back. His lips tightened again, but this time it did not look so much like a grin. For the fraction of a moment it suggested the snarl of a cornered rat.

Gregory thought better of his inordinate desire to hurl the man out on his head. He had learned by his brother's experience that it was best for Americans not to mix into a fracas with these natives.

Instead he turned to the line of unkempt constabulary soldiers.

"Throw that beach comber out of my cab," he ordered.

"We cannot, *señor*," one of them said calmly.

"What the devil do you mean, 'you cannot'? There are eight of you."

"It is his cab, *señor*," they said.

"His cab? Why, confound you idiots, it's the *alcalde's* cab, and he has put it at my disposal."

"It is his cab: he is the *alcalde's* son."

Dan gasped as if some one had struck him with a knife.

"Your future brother-in-law," the cornered rat thrust his nose again into the shaft of moonlight.

Gregory stared at him in fascinated horror.

"You are welcome to step into the cab, *señor*," the detestable fellow was chuckling. "Or do you prefer to walk?"

"No, by Heaven. I'll not give up my cab to you, not by a long shot."

Resolutely Dan got in, then with

jaws set, arms folded, he sat down.

"Which way, *señor*?" the driver asked.

"The Casino," Hidalgo's son ordered, taking it for granted that the question had been put to him.

The escort of constabulary was dismissed, and the coach started rumbling along the pier to the shoreward end.

For a moment the two men did not speak to each other. Gregory sat stiffly, his lips compressed, his brows lowered, his eyes focused on the black leather of the seat in front. It was obvious that he would make no overtures at conversation with this detestable rum-sodden cad who seemed to take a venomous delight in the word "brother-in-law."

It was Pasqual Hidalgo himself who resumed the encounter.

"Did you happen to bring down any good cigars from Havana? I would like to try one. No? Well, then, I'll have to smoke another one of these stinking stogies."

He produced one, but did not offer it to his companion. Instead he lit a match on the leather seat and held it to his face.

Dan could not withstand a sidelong glance. The match light threw the lean brown face into sharp relief. The lines were deep jet black, as if drawn in pen and ink by an artist who had a new conception of a satyr—a young satyr, with black locks, wearing an ordinary shabby straw hat.

The light went out. Dan's eyes saw darkness only, but in his brain there was the indelible tattoo of a rat's head. With the exception of the black greasy hair and the receding chin, the picture was a distorted caricature of old Señor Hidalgo. The lines of the face were as deep, the eyes as black and piercing.

The carriage turned up the narrow alley toward the Casino, and for awhile the overhanging balconies kept them in pitch darkness. The voice at Dan's side seemed to come from an impenetrable shadow.

"You will probably take charge of my father's exporting business. He wanted an Americano of good connections. I hate trade. You see, I am born to a life of gentlemanly ease."

Dan failed to suppress a grunt.

"I don't look much like a gentleman, do I? No, *por Dios*. The roulette up there at the Casino has cleaned me out of my allowance. It cleans me regularly. I have to humiliate my blood by hanging around these water-front shops, getting a drink of guaro now and then on credit. You don't happen to have a flask of something?"

"I do not."

"Well, here, I have something. Barcardi. Not so bad. You think I've had too much, probably. Not at all. But I'll take enough, at the betrothal feast. Not rum, not guaro, not gin; but some of the old gentleman's sherry. *Amoroso*. By the grace of Heaven, I shall get drunk! Drunk as a sow.

"*Por Dios*, they'll carry me out. That's what they generally do. Dolores orders some one to carry me away. She loves to do it. Just detests me, that girl. Me—with an M.A. from the Imperial and Pontifical University! What do you think of that?"

Dan did not seem to think anything about it. At any rate, he kept his opinion to himself.

"Look here, *señor*, you don't like me? Perhaps not. I don't make a good impression at first. Nor later either. They all hate me. Except the old man. He just dotes on the ground I walk on. I'm built in his image, as he says, flesh of his flesh. Look just like him. Here's another swig. You don't want any?"

"No, I do not."

"Very well. I'll take your share. Here goes. To the bride and groom. To our scion! Won't she lord it over me now, that little wench! Lord it over her big brother. *Por Dios*, she'll set you at my throat, I'll swear. I shouldn't be surprised but that you and I will have to fight it out."

This was the first sentence that did not actually nauseate Dan Gregory. It was in strange harmony with just the thought that was at that moment in his mind.

"Yes, I shouldn't be surprised either," he said.

The other laughed a snickering, sodden sort of laugh.

"You seem to be a very strong man. And doubtless good at a six-gun—like your brother."

Dan turned around with a start. But he could see nothing more than a thin dark shadow sitting next to him.

Then they came out into the broader street. The long row of palms which lined it admitted streaks of moonlight into the cab which cut across the aquiline face like flashing knives.

"We must not fight," the man was saying. "We can be of use to each other. You can get me a good job up there in your country, perhaps, where dollars are worth ten times our monkey money. That's why my father wanted you in his family. He'll use you."

Gregory doubled his fist. His companion, in his insolent assurance, did not realize how near he came to being torn to pieces.

"You don't happen to have a hundred dollars?"

"I do not. I haven't a cent to give you. You're drunk enough already."

"Very well. I won't insist. It is of little importance. Why spend money for guaro when *amontillado* will be flowing freely from now until the wedding night? The whole town will drink themselves loco on my father's money. I won't ask you for money. But I would like a letter to some of your business acquaintances in the States. I shall insist on that."

"Insist all you please."

"A good position in an importing house. A position of trust. Chances for advancement. I might add that the hours must be easy, not too long. I am not used to routine. A stenographer

or two. Blondes. Anglo-Saxon blood. You must know quite a number.

"Doubtless you can supply me with some good prospects in that line. Their home addresses also, of course. And a few good American bootleggers. Not much of a favor to ask of a brother-in-law."

His tiny glittering eyes were watching Gregory's folded arms. The arms were powerful looking. And they were restless.

"You might also give me a letter or two to the type of American ladies that will dance with me at cabarets. I am very fond of that. Of course here one gets tired of the women in our cantinas with their black hair like the mane of a horse—smelling of coconut oil. I must have an American woman. I love them."

Gregory could stand it no longer. While the old coach was bumping along over the shell road, out onto the palm-fringed main street of the town, he shoved the door open with one hand and with the other reached over and grabbed his detestable snickering companion by the nape of the neck.

It was the picture of a terrier shaking a rat. The coachman hearing the rumpus and the howl of fury from the alcalde's son, drew his horses to a stop, and jumped from his seat.

He saw a frail, shapeless body hurtling out of the door of the coach and crashing against the old ship's gunwale which lined the sidewalk.

The scion of the Hidalgo house—a sacred and privileged personage in Todos Santos, a sort of crown prince, in fact, lay in the gutter, a sodden, whimpering carcass of a man.

"*Santa Maria de Zacatula!*" the mozo cried in terror. "Señor Americano, you will be kill' to death!"

Gregory stepped out of the cab and stood over his wretched victim as if debating whether or not he should pick him up and finish him off with a good thrashing.

"Flee for your life, *señor!* You will

be kill'! You will be shot down like a dog!"

But for some reason or other Pasqual Hidalgo did not draw a gun. He had one—and Gregory had seen its ivory handle protruding from his holster, singled out by a sharp blue ray of moonlight.

Perhaps Pasqual was afraid of the Americano's gun. An Americano had killed a man very neatly but a short while before. Instead, the sniveling little heap of bones and carcass and muddy clothes stirred, took on something of the form of a man—a man sitting on the gunwale and turning his ghastly face upward in the moonlight with a deadly and venomous grin.

"Shoot him like a dog? No, *por Dios!* Why should I? I have use for him. He won't make friends—*bueno*. Then he is my enemy. And I will bleed him."

He got up, and, standing on the board sidewalk so that he was the same size as the American, he looked the latter straight in the face.

Then he lowered his voice, speaking in soft but tense tones which the coachman could not hear.

"You are a noble man, Señor Americano. I forgive you. You come back from the ship—to keep your bargain, eh? Very noble."

"A bargain!" Gregory gasped. "What in the name of the devil do you mean by that?"

"You use my sister as a pawn—to save a gringo's life."

A blinding flash of realization struck Gregory. This filthy rat knew the truth!

"The proprietor, Alvarado, up there at the Casino—he told me," the rat snarled. "But he won't tell any one else—oh, no. I warned him. I'll have his own Chink waiters kill him if he breathes a word of it. But I know. It is sufficient. You'll do what I say—"

"If you cross my path again, you filthy rat—" Gregory began in fury.

"Oh, I'll cross it. Never doubt that, *señor*. I'll come to you often. And you'll give me everything I ask for! Nor will you raise a finger against my frail little body—oh, no, *señor*. For if you do, I'll tell the *alcalde*. I'll tell how you married his daughter—a ruse, a trick.

"But now I will keep it a secret! It is valuable. If the *alcalde* knows—God help you, *señor*. There is an Inquisition here—and my father has access to it. God help you, if he finds out why you made this convenient marriage!"

Gregory stood there stunned. A fit that was like nausea gripped him, and he swayed back, staggering to the coach.

The fiend on the sidewalk was giggling and spitting.

"Take him to the Casino," he snarled. "I will walk the rest of the way."

One thought buoyed Gregory, resuscitated him, gave him a tiny rift of hope. This man would provoke him to a fight. In the fight Gregory would finish him. It would come sooner or later. But the best thing to do now was to bide his time. To act as if this "brother-in-law" did not exist.

As the coach started to rumble along the rough road, Gregory heard the parting sally from that slim, dark shadow on the sidewalk.

"You call me a rat—eh? No, you are wrong. I am not a rat. I am a leech."

It is unnecessary to describe that betrothal feast. It is sufficient to quote the headlines of two articles that appeared the next morning in the *Todos Santos Mundo*. They give in a terse way the cause and effect of that whole hectic melodrama:

"Doña Dolores, daughter of the *alcalde*, to wed scion of American family— Betrothal fiesta at the Casino last night an affair that was impromptu, brilliant, historic."

The other article, appearing in an

adjacent column, was headed as follows:

"Bartolo Miguel y Cobija, rich sugar planter, a suicide."

The latter announcement was inaccurate. Some knew that a young *Americano* had murdered the planter, and had been allowed to return to his steamer. It was merely a convenient way of announcing a death, and of avoiding complications between the little republic of San Sebastian Libre, and the United States.

Three men knew that there was a definite relationship between the two articles—the relationship of cause and effect. Gregory; the proprietor; and the detestable sot, Pasqual Hidalgo.

A surreptitious murder in a gaming house, a brilliant betrothal feast in the adjacent room. One the result of the other—that was the beginning of the drama.

Gregory was satisfied. He was taking the place of a condemned man. You might say that he was offering himself up as a hostage. He was offering his life. But instead of being given to a firing squad, he was given for the rest of his days to a very attractive Spanish *señorita*!

That was the price fate demanded Dan Gregory pay for the hasty act of his younger brother.

CHAPTER V

THE CONSUL AND THE WOMAN



THE day of the wedding dawned.

Dan woke up experiencing a good fit of morning-after blues, which in that country they call a "*goma*." A feeling of deadly oppression, as if the dank languorous air were getting too thick to breathe, began to weigh upon him.

He took his snack of breakfast in bed. It was the city house of the *alcalde*—the "*palacio*"—and for two weeks he had been living a riotous life

of state banquets, military parades, carnivals, and fiestas given by the middle and lower class, which were like the days given in honor of their saints.

A drink of pineapple juice and rum to straighten himself, then he looked at his watch. Eight hours more before the terrible hour. He consoled himself. He was taking his brother's place. It might have been eight hours more before the execution.

Looking out through the foliage of potted plants on the gallery, he saw that the plaza was already assuming the aspect of a country fair.

The plaza was crowded with wooden wheel carts drawn by oxen, with temporary booths of palm thatch in which Indians from the inland were selling drinks, beads, the sweet cakes called *rosquetes*; Caribs and their families, trains of mules with jingling bells; charcoal burners, banana cutters, negroes, Guanacos, hawkahs, and the inevitable undertone of it all—the hum of stinging flies, the bark of dogs, the crying of babies.

Looking toward the seaward side of the plaza, Dan could see a checkerboard of roofs, galvanized iron, palm thatch, red tile. Off there on the point where the Presidio Fort was he could see little puffs of white smoke, followed by the boom of seven salutes.

"Is it a revolution?" he asked of the servant who had brought his breakfast.

"The Bishop of Zacatula is coming in on the Puerto Cortez packet," the mozo said. "He is going to officiate."

That was bad news. They were going to make a state affair out of the confounded wedding.

More planters were coming down from the foothills. Rawboned plugs mounted by old greasers drawing their families along at the end of a lariat attached to dried rawhide. Little children sat on the rawhide, sliding along in the dust.

Above the din there came another sound. Off there in the Presidio, Dan

could hear the pulsating strains of a band. It was practicing for the coming event: Yankee Doodle, the Wedding March, and that ridiculous fandango, the San Sebastian National Hymn.

The music drifted across the house tops, through the groves of rubber trees, bananas, coconuts. Dan could hear every instrument of the band distinctly despite the distance. It must have been the trade winds wafting the rhythm through the steamy hot air.

He bathed, dressed, and was shaved by the *alcalde's* barber.

Seven hours more.

A little later he was paid a more or less official visit by the major-domo of the *alcalde's* house—a fat, yellow-faced little man, with thick gray hair and dandruff on his alpaca coat.

"I wish to lay before you, for your consideration and acceptance, the routine of the wedding," he said humbly.

Dan sank helplessly into the low rattan armchair, offered the dignitary a cigar, lit one for himself.

"It will be advisable to be at the American Consulate at twilight, for it is from there that you will ride to the Mission. The sun sets here at six—as you probably know. There will be a sunset gun. The San Luis Band will play our national hymn, followed by the 'Star Spangled Banner.' The flag at the Stinson General Store will be hoisted."

Stinson was the American consul, and when he was not in his bed with malaria, he kept a store of imported French goods, laces, jewelry, fans. Also cutlery, knives, and machetes manufactured in Connecticut, United States of America.

"Upon the playing of your national anthem you and the consul will step into the carriage which will be waiting for you in front of the store. A color guard will precede the horses. The troops will be lined up in the plaza and the color squad will leave you, carrying the American flag to Gomez's Statue."

He pointed out to the center of the plaza, where Dan could see the grim iron statue of the San Sebastian liberator.

"Our national flag and its guard will be placed on the right of the statue, and will be dipped as you pass. I suggest that you acknowledge the salute in any way you see fit. The gesture of a hand, the removal of your hat, what you will."

He went on, as if reciting a well conned speech:

"The bride and her father will follow shortly after in their carriage. The San Sebastian flag will precede them when they pass the Gomez Statue."

"Quite a coronation," the bridegroom observed. "I had no idea what I was getting into."

"Your carriage will drive through the plaza, thence down the western side—the Casino, the Consolidated Fruit offices, and down the boulevard toward the Mission San Felipe. Do not let the firecrackers which will be shot off in your honor startle you. It is a custom of our people. They love firecrackers either at a fiesta for a saint or during our national holidays."

He wiped his forehead with a red bandanna and continued:

"The bride and her father will be driven to the front of the Mission church. You will be driven to the west, where one of the *padres* will direct you to the sacristy. The moment for your entrance into the church will be determined by the *padres*. Have no feeling of discomfort once you are in their hands."

"I shall go through the ordeal with courage," Gregory said. He might have said that he would meet his fate facing the firing squad without flinching, and without a blindfold. That is the train of thought these preparations started in his mind.

"It is all I have to say, then, *señor*," the major-domo concluded. "Have you any question to ask?"

Gregory thought a moment. There was one question. But he did not want to ask it of this uncomfortable and pompous little man. He wanted to ask it of the "bride"—and of no one else.

He wanted to say: "Look here, little Doña Dolores. You have probably forgotten our flaming hour back there in the *patio* that night. We meant nothing by it. It was a mere flirtation of a tropical night, the sort of game that is dear to your heart."

"But I do not love you. If you do not love me, say so, and I will drop out of sight. Otherwise I will stick to my bargain. I will stick to it for the rest of my life."

The major-domo was speaking diffidently: "You seem to be puzzled, *señor*. Is there any particular part of the program you wish me to elucidate?"

"None. You have been quite explicit."

"Thank you, *señor*. Then if you have no further question—"

Gregory put up his hand. "There is something I wish to ask."

"Yes, *señor*?"

"This wedding seems to be taking on the proportions of a national event. I understand the guests will include all the Creole society, the officers of high command, the civil authorities of this particular province."

"Yes, *señor*. The list will be presented to you for your approval."

"I approve of any one in the country. I am a stranger. Ask everybody. I shall not object. Except—"

"Yes, *señor*?"

"I happened by chance to meet the bride's brother—on the pier the first night I arrived in the country."

"You mean Señor Pasqual Hidalgo? *Por Dios*—that is quite a good joke."

"Why is it a joke?"

"That he should meet the future husband of Doña Dolores."

"What is so funny about that?"

"Doña Dolores despises him, *señor*."

"Indeed!" Dan was going to say he admired her taste.

"The fact is this Pasqual Hidalgo is something of a rake, *señor*. His father permits him to do as he pleases—and inasmuch as his father is the highest authority in this province, the young man can do no wrong. I might say, *señor*"—he lowered his voice and whispered with a look of satisfaction in his eyes—"I might say that he is a sort of scapegrace, a drunkard, you know, and were it not for the fact that his father has a doting worship for the fellow, he would be an outcast."

"The question I wanted to ask," Gregory said, as if anxious to put a stop to this gossip, "is this: will Pasqual Hidalgo be a guest at the wedding?"

"*Santa Maria de Zacatula*, no, *señor*! The fact is, he has not been seen since the night you mention. He goes off on periodic tours up and down the coast in his motor boat. A beach comber, I might call him.

"Has a Carib wife up there in one of the fishing villages near the Sierra Cacao. Another half-breed wife—or whatever you might call her—down by Armadillo River. Once in a while he travels all the way up to Belize in British Honduras, where in the cantinas he has a friend or two—American or English women.

"And now it is rumored on the water front that he has recently picked up some sort of an adventuress who has been seen along the coast banging around the seaports searching a fortune. He is off on a hunting trip right now—so it is rumored—hunting for this beach comber of a woman."

"Very well," Gregory said. "As long as he is not going to be at the wedding, I am no longer interested in him."

"Thank you, *señor*," the housekeeper concluded. "And is there anything else?"

"Nothing."

"And so I may take my leave?"

"You may."

"Thank you, *señor*."

He bowed himself out backward, and Gregory was left alone in the sweltering hot room, fighting mosquitoes, puffing hungrily at his cigar, groping frantically for some undefined sort of a hope.

He looked again at the clock.

The morning was passing.

For awhile he sat out on the veranda, gasping for a breath of the sea air. From his secluded position he could watch the plaza down below, swarming like a mused-up ant hill.

Guitars were playing. Yankee Doodle, syncopated to a fandango, drifted through the heavy air from the Presidio band. The breeze had fallen. Muffled and distant there came the slower strains of the Wedding March from bugle and trombone and cornet. Drums beat dolefully to the rhythm. It was more like a funeral march.

Down there in the dry grass and withered trees of the *patio* the hawkahs were plying a good trade. Indian girls and sailors and farmers were eating everything: tamales, cakes of corn boiled in lime water, dried shrimps, pineapples preserved with sugar, cups of ground chocolate with cinnamon and maize.

What the people threw away the flies and the dogs ate. The place was literally crawling with life: babies, chickens, dogs, donkeys.

Yes, a historic event was coming to pass. San Sebastian Libre and the United States were being joined together symbolically in marriage, as in old times they joined two kingdoms by the marriage of a princess to a crown prince.

One hour until the wedding.

A "condemned man" looked to the sky, estimating the moments that were left of life.

The sun was moving toward the peaks of the Cordillera in the west.

One little hour.

It was time to go to the consulate.

Peter B. Stinson, United States Consul to Todos Santos, had spent the last two or three weeks in bed with his seasonal recurrence of malaria. Since Gregory's arrival he had called daily at Stinson's bedside, for he was the only possible confidant that could be found in the seaport.

To him Gregory had unfolded his soul. "A promise of marriage to a girl. My brother saved." That was the first promise. The conclusion: "I shall not run away. I shall keep my word."

There was not another American in the whole province who would have accepted that as the only possible conclusion. There were a few clerks at the Consolidated Fruit offices, a superintendent of the fruit railway, a bar-keep, a proprietor of a water-front dance hall, a few of the inevitable beach combers.

They would have said to Dan: "If you don't want to marry the girl, who in tarnation is making you! Get up and beat it on the next freighter."

But Peter B. Stinson agreed with Dan. There was one conclusion, and only one. Stinson used the words "sacred duty" until they were dog-eared.

With a negro servant carrying his suitcase, in which was his evening dress, Dan Gregory walked around the corner, down a side alley from the alcalde's house, to the Stinson General Store.

Upon asking for the consul, he was told by a native clerk that Señor Stinson was upstairs at the time in conference. It seemed, however, that the clerk had been ordered to usher the "bridegroom" to the upper chambers immediately upon his arrival.

As he mounted the adobe stairs in the back of the store, passing the shelves of oarlocks, cordage, daggers, fringed shawls, Dan Gregory had the feeling that he was taking one more step toward the prison in which for the rest of his life he would be held.

He was gripped by a feeling of abject hopelessness combined with a half formed desire that this humble representative of his great government might by some hook or crook suggest a way whereby he might escape his fate and still retain his honor.

But there was no way—at least, none that the consul could have anything to do with. It was a matter entirely between Dan Gregory and his own conscience. What had the consul to do with that?

And now came an incident which made the prospect of Dan Gregory's lifelong bondage seem tenfold more terrible than ever.

An American girl was in the room!

Where she had come from, unless from the sky, Dan could not guess. She just appeared there—as if the flabby old malaria-ridden consul had conjured her up by some sort of black magic known only to the witch doctors of the Caribbean seas.

A slim Amazon with amber eyes, she stood between the adobe pillars that gave out on the veranda. Her background was the blue sea, and the massive volcano island of El Capitan. The sun glowed in her tawny hair—for she had removed her pith helmet and was holding it in her hand.

Her khaki clothes were torn—which suggested that she had been through some pretty rough jungle. River mud was on her boots. Guinca grass stuck to the lacing. She was dilapidated, pale, broken, exhausted, with lips that trembled, and a chest heaving in gasps. She supported herself by a clenched freckled hand pressed against the table.

And yet what a strangely beautiful thing she was—as if the big consul had trapped her and brought her down out of the wilds of the Cordillera—like that rare and sacred bird, the huitzin of the gods.

"Hello, there, Dan! Glad you came in time to meet Miss Cameron."

Peter B. Stinson was a large, flabby

man with a rim of white hair about his billiard ball head. His recent attack of malaria had left him shaky.

"This is Mr. Gregory, Dan Gregory. Our countryman."

They shook hands. The girl was

putting up his hand. "Wait now. I wanted you two to meet. He'll say nothing of this. You understand, Dan? She's not supposed to have come here. She's not supposed to be in town.

"Came in a thatch-covered wagon,



THE MEETING OF TWO AMERICANS
IN A FOREIGN LAND

staring at him hungrily, studying his magnificent, athletic frame. She was clutching his hand, looking at it, then up to his face, then at his great chest. When the consul stopped she looked back to him, and at the ridiculous contrast of his flabby paunch and jowls.

She felt Dan Gregory clinging to her then, and she tried to draw away. "Why can't he—" she began falteringly, turning to Stinson.

"Why can't he?" Stinson repeated,

She bribed a Carib fisherman. The streets are crowded and every one agog over the wedding—that fact helped her to get in from the jungle unnoticed."

Dan remembered seeing a wooden-wheeled *caretta* out in the street.

"I must tell you, ma'am, he's to be married—to-night."

A look of utter dismay swept over her face. The light went out of her eyes. She uttered a gasp. It was little more than, "Oh, I see." But what a world of tragedy was implied in those few words!

"Perhaps to-morrow—" the consul began.

"No," she cried, tearing her hand away. "It's too late."

"Too late?" Dan stammered. "Too late—for what? I'm in the dark. What's going to be too late?"

The consul answered even though he was definitely left out of the vital

drama of their glances. "He's to be married this evening at the Mission. Hidalgo's daughter is the bride. Maybe you don't know Hidalgo. Owns this town—and San Luis, too. A big state wedding. I'm to represent America. I'm also the best man."

"Yes, yes. I understand," she said. "You mustn't disappoint her. You can't do that." She covered her tangled hair with the pith hat, and buckled the strap under her chin. You might have thought she was hanging herself.

"I must get away—as soon as I can. Mustn't be seen here." She faced the old man. "You won't fail?"

"Do you have the slightest fear about that?" he said, flushing.

She looked at his trembling, flabby hands. Then her eyes went back to Dan.

He had the peculiar impression that he had come to a great crisis in his life, that he had been put to a test and was found wanting.

Perspiration broke out on his face as she weighed him.

He saw her bite her lip until it bled.

Then abruptly she turned and fled down the adobe stairs.

CHAPTER VI

THE TWO DUTIES



OTH the men stared at the archway through which she had gone.

Old Stinson held the smoke of his cigar in his open mouth, and then with an almost audible sound exhaled it in a thick puff.

"What in the name of Heaven do you make of her!" he cried.

Dan did not hear him. He was still staring at the empty archway. All the other light in the room—the hot sun blazing on the adobe wall, the yellow mats, the rattan screens which hung from all the arches but one of the veranda side, the blinding glitter of the lagoon, the snowwhite lines of surf be-

yond the barrier, the giant volcano radiating heat over the face of the sea—all this light darkened and concentrated itself on the one dim space where they had last seen the girl running down the steps.

Then the consul's voice echoing across vast spaces of time and place, awoke Dan. He wheeled abruptly.

"What was the matter? Who is she? What did she want? What was frightening her? I mean, tell me—quick—who is that girl?"

"Damned if I know!" the consul shot back.

Gregory swore, and took the inert, lumbering fellow by his shoulders. "Stinson! What in hell's name! She was crazy! I saw it in her eyes. She clutched my hands as if she were drowning, by God!"

"You aren't far wrong," the other said. He broke away and reached for a glass—a good stiff dose of quinine. "There's Barcardi. Better take a shot."

Dan disregarded the offer. "What did she want? Why did she want you? Why can't she be seen here in town? Can't you talk, Stinson, or must I shake the truth out of you?"

"The truth? Ah, that's it. What do I know about the truth? She poured out an incoherent jumble of words. What am I to make of it? Threats, kidnaping, an attempted abduction, an expedition wiped out one by one, a girl coming to the American Consulate for help—good God! Could you make anything out of a yarn like that?"

"You don't mean that you doubt what she's been telling you!" Dan cried.

"There you go! It's not for me to doubt. I'm not a judge. I am not a human being. I'm a symbol. I'm an intangible, tremendous power of which all Central America is afraid. I'm a representative, but I don't have the power of that which I represent.

"A weak, shaky old man—that's all.

Look at me. Do I look like the United States of America? No, by gad—and yet I've got to do what the States would do. I've got a course set for me—the same as you—duty, sacrifice—"

Dan put a stop to his panegyrics.

"What do you need? A battleship—the marines? A whole nation to help that poor distracted woman? By God, take me! I'll do anything! I'll recruit an army, so help me. I'll be an army itself."

"Now you're getting beyond your depth. I haven't told you what she told me. She's in a fix—a fix that requires one man as a liberator. She chose me. You saw her choose me. Can this consulate send an American girl out in the street without promising to help—and backing up that promise?"

He doped himself again with water and quinine.

"I've got to meet her on the San Luis tracks at the first forest station. She's hidden her sloop in the river. The tide will turn at dark so we can sail."

"What for? Where does the sacrifice come in! Tell me everything unless you want to make me crazy, too!"

"She doesn't want you," Stinson snorted. "You remember what she said about Hidalgo's daughter: 'You must not disappoint her.'"

"Then what *does* she want!"

"Well, first let me tell you who she says she is: Her story hitches up with something that happened a couple of years ago. They came down on one of the Consolidated Fruit steamers. I was off to Puerto Cortez at the time. Didn't see them."

"Them? Who are the rest?"

"A party of archaeologists from the States. Her father was the leader. Cameron was the name. The skipper told me all about him. Always with a map and a lot of papers. Studied them all the way down. Had his assistants forever making drawings and reports. There were two of 'em—"

"But the girl—"

"Wait. You'll understand her better if I begin at the beginning. They bought a sloop from one of these breeds in town who's in the bootlegging trade between here and New Orleans. The sloop's important. She came back in a sloop after it all happened—"

"After what—"

"I'm coming to that. Sailed the sloop by herself. What do you make of that? A little girl sailing a seventy-foot ship along these reefs. Never heard of such a thing. Some nerve or else just sheer ignorance. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Get this: They cruised for a year or so along the Mosquito Banks from Cape Cameron to Honduras making charts."

Dan was pacing up and down the floor while the consul, standing up and following him with his eyes, was sipping at his glass of water and quinine.

"All they wanted as far as any one could make out was stuff for a museum back in the States. Evidences of Mayan civilization in the San Sebastian coast range—that's what the expedition was got up for. I remember reading about it in the *Maritimo*."

"Where's the rest of the expedition?" Dan asked.

"Dead and gone. She's the only one left."

"You mean she's still carrying on the work—alone—*down here*!"

"It looks like that. Still hunting. Crazy—that's my verdict. They all go crazy, these explorers crawling around in the fever-ridden swamps for old carved stones. Doesn't that sound a bit crazy? It seems to get in their blood, and they never give up. And here comes this girl saying she's found what she wanted—what her father had spent a lifetime in hunting."

"Thought you said something about two years?"

"Two years on this coast," the consul explained. "But many years before that, studying maps, manuscripts, books, in every library in Spain and Mexico."

"You say she's found what they set out to find?"

"Some sort of a *cenote*. I mean one of these sacrificial wells where the ancient Mayans used to throw their virgins and their gold and jewels, to appease the gods. She said she saw the well—saw the slime-covered stuff. Chests, urns, idols." The consul laughed. "An optical illusion. She's just plain daft, that's all."

"She's daft if she told you where it is," Dan said.

"Oh, no—not as daft as that. She didn't tell me. She said she wanted help. One man. She would divide this treasure—this hallucination—with one man. But he must fight."

"Fight?" Dan looked at the shaky old frame. Something amused him in this drama of a lonely, excited girl coming to old, palsied Stinson and asking him to be her champion. "Who does she want you to fight?" he asked.

"It seems that she had been trailed. How long, she could not tell. But when she came to the well, two men jumped out of the brush. She was quick enough to escape them, but she left her hallucination, her dream of Mayan gold, sunk there in that jungle hole!"

There came the distant boom of a cannon—a single salute to the parting day.

It awoke Dan to a terrible, but intoxicating truth. The hour of his wedding was at hand.

And he was in love!

He knew it now. Indeed he must have known it on the very instant that he saw that American girl with her amber eyes blazing in excitement and in worship of his strength. He knew it when he first saw her tortured with the news that she could not have him.

And here he was, for the first time in his life, desperately in love while the band was beginning the march to the strains of which he must go to meet Doña Dolores!

The consul plied himself with another

shot of quinine, then took a six-gun and holster from the wall.

"She comes to the American Consul," he was muttering. "Flees from the jungle, and comes to *me*. That's what a consul has to put up with! A girl comes to him thinking a pile of mud has jewels in it—a girl with an obsession to carry on the work of her poor, old, crazed father."

"What are you going to do?" Dan asked pointedly.

"Well, confound it, being the consul I can't very well refuse one of my own countrywomen assistance, can I? She puts it in a way that no man can refuse. *She wants me to fight!*"

"You'll go off there into the jungle and be shot," Dan said dryly.

"I don't doubt it."

"You mean you're afraid?"

"Don't make me laugh!"

Both men were aware that the band at the Presidio was playing the "Star Spangled Banner."

"There's a good accompaniment to our confab—our hymn," the consul said. "Suppose I follow a crazy girl into the jungle and get shot. It's not a bad ending."

"Our death march—eh, Stinson?" Dan said. He was at once drunken with love, and dead calm in the presence of his fate.

"That ought to remind us of our two duties. Nothing for us to kick about. No two men had their jobs cut out for them better than this. My duty as consul—to help a poor locoed American girl. Your duty keeping your promise to a Spanish *señorita*."

"You lucky hound!" Dan burst out in agony.

"Lucky. Yes. To go into the jungle and get shot in the line of duty. That's luck. So's your job: to be able to save your brother by living a life of luxury in a Spanish American palacio."

"Confound you for an idiot! I'd give my life to be in your shoes!"

"I'd give mine to be in yours."

The majestic strains were swelling,

pulsating on the spicy breeze.

"At least we aren't beach-combers enough to back out," the old consul said: "Here I've rotted away for ten years chattering my teeth out with malaria, but I still cling to a miserable straw of honor as I drown!"

"If you and I could only change places!" Dan cried desperately.

"What a romance! What a legend! You and I change each other's souls!" He laughed and shivered. "If I were only as good-looking as you—and as young—and if Doña Dolores would have me!"

"If I only had your confounded luck!"

"Go ahead and change your clothes. We're late!"

"I'd give my life if I could change my clothes with you—a khaki hunting outfit—a holster and gun! God, what luck some men have."

A salute of seven guns came booming across the housetops from the lagoon. It was in honor of the visiting representative of the president-dictator. The reverberations went through Gregory to the marrow of his bones, like the coming of some inexorable doom.

"I'm warning you to hurry up, Dan! Confound it all, you're going to be late!"

"Late?" the other asked tonelessly. "What time are you going to meet this girl?"

It seemed as if he had misunderstood the consul entirely. The appointment that mattered was not the wedding of Doña Dolores, and the alcalde and the President's representative. It was the appointment with the American girl.

"Look here!" the consul exclaimed. "You don't mean to say you're faltering? You—after your great gesture. Are you going to run away from your promise to Dolores after all?"

"No, by Heaven! Who said that?"

The one responsive chord within Dan's tortured soul had been touched.

His course was clear enough. He must not falter. He had given his word. He had a duty. The consul had his.

Peter B. Stinson, broken in health, was going out calmly enough to a duty that he felt would result in his death. There was a splendid example for Dan to follow.

Like an automaton, given a semblance of life by some malevolent inner power, Dan changed to his evening clothes.

It was but a few moments later—while the band still played their own national hymn that Gregory and the consul stepped into the carriage.

CHAPTER VII

WITH THE STUCCO SAINTS



THEY rode to the wedding. The overhanging balconies, almost meeting across the street, shut out what little misty air there was above. Crowds of people followed. Dan could not escape them. He could not escape the dark eyes of women looking at him through the rusty filigree of their windows. He could not escape their faces peering down upon him from above. Hawkahs, Indians, sailors, cargadores; dogs, chickens, babies—every living thing was staring at him.

The town had responded in a romantic way to this coming wedding. The young Americano was a hero. The political ruler Hidalgo had offered him the hand of his daughter in marriage. A great epic of San Sebastian.

Señoras waved their fans and threw flowers down into the carriage from their balconies. Muleteers got their trains of pack beasts out of the way. Farmers, charcoal burners from the Sierras, banana cutters, took off their sombreros and lined the street.

There was no escaping them. Dan shrank back in his seat, glum, shy to the point of torture, watching the

hunched back of the old mozo driving the plugs.

The plaza was black with people. All Todos Santos was there, augmented by the populace of the countryside, the Carib villages, the surrounding plantations. It was a veritable sea of sombreros, bordered by shores of palm trees.

As Dan's carriage rumbled into the plaza, the guests were already arriving at the old adobe cathedral.

A general riding a pinto arrived from the Presidio. His cavalry bumped along behind him at an uncomfortable trot, with sabers drawn, sombreros tipped this way and that, blue coats buttoned if worn by thin soldiers, unbuttoned if worn by fat ones.

Seven guns boomed in his honor. Then seven for the secretario of public works, who came next, riding in a fiacre with ancient Señora Hidalgo, grandmother of the bride.

Then Dan Gregory and the consul reached the statue in the middle of the plaza. The third salute of seven guns started to boom. Skyrockets shot up from the four clumps of rubber trees in the corners of the square. The band, posted before the statue of the patriot liberator, José Xallaci, struck up the national hymn.

Which way could Dan run for a breath of air? Not toward the sea. All those alleys were jammed with people, people on the discarded ship gunwales, people in the dusty streets, people standing on wooden carts, people on the steps of doorways.

People who were in constant movement of removing sombreros, waving them in the air, huzzaing, darting into cantinas for more guaro or white-eye, dark-skinned men quarreling, elbowing each other out of the way.

In the dry grass about the statue, there was something of a breathing space which Dan welcomed as the carriage drove past the band. The color squad bearing the San Sebastian national flag, saluted. The two Ameri-

canos removed their hats, and the carriage swung off for the cathedral.

A fresh salvo of rockets burst in the glowing mist of heat and vapor high overhead. Gregory looked up as the long streamers of sparks floated down to the tops of the swaying palms, the tiled roofs, the black alleyways.

General Morada's detachment of horsemen had lined up on the grass opposite the cathedral door. Some one was assisting Señora Hidalgo from her carriage. A little man with dusty spectacles, the president's representative, took the ancient dowager's arm, and she strutted up the adobe steps, fanning her swarthy wrinkled countenance fiercely.

The three, the general, the secretario, and the dowager, were swallowed in the blazing heat of the candle-lit church.

Dan's equipage swung off into a side alley, a lane opening in the throng, like the passage in the Red Sea.

They drove to the rear of the Mission, where the street was comparatively deserted.

In the cantina on the other side of the narrow thoroughfare some sort of a fight was going on. The angry, high-pitched tenor shouts mingled with the jagged rhythm of a mechanical piano. From the windows of the church, open except for the rusty bars of iron, there came labored organ strains.

The great adobe walls meanwhile echoed back the San Luis military band. Quite a potpourri of song: the anthem of the old reed organ, the national hymn of the band, the Texas Tommy of the cantina piano!

At the side entrance a *padre* in brown cassock and sandals greeted the two Americanos.

The "best man" was a mountain of steaming flesh, nervous as a cat, fuming at a large perfecto.

Dan alighted, standing for a moment in the band of blazing light from the window of the church. Through the rusty filigreed bars came a blast of

heat, of the breath of the wedding guests jammed in the pews, of the waxen odor of a thousand candles.

The Americanos were ushered into the private sanctuary of the bishop.

The room was crowded and hot, but another formal ceremony, the introduction of the groom to the presiding ecclesiastic, had to be observed.

The bishop was seated eating olives and soda crackers. Three of the old San Felipe *padres* were standing near him, already clothed in their scarlet and purple robes. Two Indians, body servants to the bishop, were smoothing out the jeweled surplice and getting the rest of the regalia ready.

It was a typical combination of medieval Spain and primitive Central America.

Dan Gregory bowed respectfully to the historic old figure. The bishop of Zacatula was the son of that liberator whose statue was in the plaza. He was, in fact, a living replica of the green bronze figure, although he scarcely seemed more lifelike. A tiny, shriveled man, he seemed like a mummy swathed in jeweled robes.

The ceremony was brief, but it accentuated the national significance that this wedding had assumed. The bishop was a political power, the man behind the throne of El President Caborca.

For half a century he had steered the ship of state. He was now eighty-one years old, a wisp of a man, with a parchment face, clawlike hands shaking with palsy; lips mottled and puckered, mumbling as the broken teeth munched at a chili-soaked olive.

The ashes of an ancient fire. That is how he impressed Dan Gregory: the fire which had forged great things for San Sebastian Libre, that had built colleges, museums, hospitals, nunneries, new orders. Here in this hot little room stood the man who had built a nation out of swamps and volcanoes.

He looked at the bridegroom without apparently seeing him. He looked beyond him, with red, bleary eyes. He

spoke a word or two in English, ordered the youth to approach him, and without rising, pinned a badge and medal on his breast—the Order of San Sebastian Hidalgo.

He then turned to the lumbering, perspiring American consul. A word or two concerning the mingling of the blood of his great country with the Creole blood of San Sebastian; the felicitous promise of trade relations, the solemnization of a state wedding—that was the gist of his speech.

The two Americanos were then given directions concerning their duties in the elaborate ritual that was to follow. The best man was to stand in the doorway behind the choir with the bridegroom and enter twenty seconds after the entrance of the bishop and his vicars.

The signal for the bishop's entrance would be the Wedding March. The bride and her father, the choir boys, and the procession of bridesmaids would at the same time march down the nave of the church.

The two Americanos, accepting this instruction, bowed themselves out of the bishop's room and went down the dimly lit corridor to the other side of the altar.

Along the length of the corridor there were dark niches in which were placed life-sized stucco images of saints.

As Dan passed one of these an arm thrust out and plucked him by the sleeve.

He turned with a start, peering into the deeply wrinkled face not of a saint, but of an old woman with dim black eyes.

"What in the devil—"

She put a gnarled finger to her lips and Dan waited till the consul and the *padre* had passed on into the door of the sacristy.

"I am *dueña* to thees Hidalgos," she said in her broken Spanish. "*Si*, a message from the bride before you become member of our house."

Dan waited, gasping for his breath. He still had the impression that she was one of those stucco saints come to life by a miracle.

"Doña Dolores is just and perfect. She will marry you, be your *mujer*. *Sí, señor*. Her father mak's command. The good daughter she is obey the command. Otherwise the torture for her. She is obey the command. You sabe?"

Dan gasped an oath: "You mean she is being forced into this wedding?"

"*Sí, señor*. She dare not mak' disobey. No, *por Dios*. She will give herself to you, *Americano*, for wife. But she lofs othe: *hombre!*"

"What! You sa r she—"

The *dueña* must have been surprised at the curious way the bridegroom received her dreadful news.

"Ees life of bondage for my little *chiquita* who I nurse from girl child. But she must submit!"

Dan clutched fiercely at the withered old arm. Was she real—this image in a saint's niche? The old thing was whimpering, her whistling voice broken with sobs. "Doña Dolores the good, will from this night be call '*La Sinventua*'—the Unhappy One!"

The bridegroom whispered eagerly, frantically.

"You mean because of this damnable wedding?"

"I must spik the truth, *señor*. She mak's command that I spik before thees sacred union. She lofs wan Spanish youth—captain in se constabulary. *Sabe?* He has swear' he will commit the suicide at the wedding feast!"

"Doña Dolores wants me to know?"

"*Sí, señor*. She is just. She wants you to know that Spanish *señorita* can lof only the one *hombre* through eternity—"

"And I am not the *hombre*."

"Poor, good youth—my heart she is break for you! You are the hosband, but not the man she lofs."

Dan heard the voice of Peter B.

Stinson calling to him. But he did not look away from the dim dark eyes, the parchment face.

"*Señora*," he said in a fierce exultant whisper. "*Señora*, you stay in this niche with the saints—where you belong." He kissed the withered old hand. "You yourself, *señora*, are a saint, or an angel from Heaven."

He left her weeping.

She was a sympathetic old saint. Tears were in her dim eyes. Tears for her beloved Unhappy One; tears for this youth—this disillusioned bridegroom!

CHAPTER VIII

DOLORES LAUGHS

"**W**HAT the devil's happened to you?" the best man cried, as he came running back into the corridor, puffing and snorting.

"Nothing. I'm—I'm all right. I lost you—" Dan stammered brokenly.

The consul saw that the young fellow was dazed.

"Here, you, come along with us. We'll get you a drink." He peered at Dan intently. "Something's got you, Dan. Your voice, it sounded queer. You aren't faltering?"

"Let's both have a drink." Dan actually laughed.

The consul called to the sacristan and whispered to him. The latter smiled, nodded. He was like a busy hen compared to the two big *Americanos*.

He lifted his yellow forefinger and announced in Spanish that there would be time for all three to repair to the sacristy.

As they passed behind the altar Dan caught a glimpse of the nondescript audience, sweltering there in the nave. A group of *padres* in their full regalia, monks swinging censers, swarthy little choir boys in scarlet and white lace were waiting expectantly.

Leading them through several iron-barred doors, the old *padre* brought them to the sacristy.

It was empty not only of the Todos Santos church dignitaries, but likewise of its wealth of jeweled chalices, embroidered robes, golden vessels. All the wealth of the old San Felipe Mission was to be displayed before that eager audience.

Surrounded by a litter of empty hangars, bare tables, piles of moth balls, Dan Gregory and the consul and the old sacristan drank their goblets of wine.

It was a silent ceremony, for the peal of the organ was muffled, almost inaudible. But through a grimly ironed window the banging of the Texas Tommy from the cantina across the road drifted in. From the distant and troubled world which was the crowded plaza, came the rise and fall of a familiar rhythm—Sousa's "Hands Across the Sea."

The big consul, streaming with perspiration, tossed off the thick red wine. And with a deliberate, incredible calmness Gregory sipped at his silver goblet.

"Hurry up, Dan, for God's sake! We've got to be up there with the bishop before the girl comes!"

Dan sipped. The consul, flabby, trembling, his collar wilted about the streaming folds of his fat neck, paced up and down between the empty tables. He looked at his wrist watch. He cocked an ear trying to catch the organ strains.

"B' God—if they start playing the Wedding March, and we aren't out there with the bishop—"

"I want another drink," Dan said calmly.

The consul swore, paced again, began swatting mosquitoes with a murderous swinging of his arms.

Dan began sipping his second glass.

"You'll get drunk," the consul said.

He paced again, slapping his forehead where a mosquito had alighted.

Dan sat on the edge of one of the tables. He gazed up at the iron-barred window. The Texas Tommy had started all over again, rollicking, broken, leaving out an important note in every bar. It was glorious, hideous, frightfully audacious.

The air was pregnant with conflict, which is the soul of drama. Drama within the sanctuary: a virgin led to the sacrifice; a lover ready to blow out his own brains—his revolver ready; and also a good speech probably, to be delivered at the wedding feast.

Drama beyond the cathedral walls: in the cantina across the street three or four men were after one *señorita*. Old grudges wiped out. Quarrels, drunkenness, prayers, an organ pealing hymns, a band playing an American air. Strings of firecrackers hanging from the balcony sputtering happily. A cannon saluting the alcalde! What a splendid night!

"Did you bring your gun?" Dan asked quietly.

The consul looked at him with a start.

"Can't you forget my duty?"

"Did you bring your gun, I asked? And your horse and your hunting togs—for the jungle?"

"Confound it, of course not!"

"Then how—"

"If you'll forget that girl, and keep your mind on this wedding, I'll tell you." He lowered his voice so that the old sacristan on the other side of the room could not hear. "I'm to get outfitted at French Pete's—out there on the San Luis track."

Old Stinson was tortured with heat and the sharp smell of the moth balls.

"I've got to get air. Come on!"

Dan lit another cigarette with maddening deliberation. "Will this French Pete keep his mouth shut?" he asked.

"For fifty pesos he'll keep anybody's mouth shut. I mean he'd commit murder." He added desperately:

"Now are you coming?"

"Not yet."

The consul lifted his fists, swore, wiped his streaming forehead. The Presidio cannon started again. It was the second salvo.

"There they come now!" Stinson cried excitedly. "The bride and her father."

Dan did not move from his complacent posture. Seated there on the edge of the table. He was listening with a maddening indifference to the booming of the cannon. The sound was an integral part of the fiesta, a fiesta which no longer concerned him, a maelstrom of human life, drunkenness, carnival, firecrackers: a man in a saloon knifed by an enemy, a bride riding into the plaza amid the cheers of a crowded city.

"Look here, *padre*," the consul said to the sacristan. "Have they started the Wedding March?"

The old *padre* listened, scowling. The Texas Tommy was louder than the wheezy old organ. "I cannot hear."

The consul swore. He backed away, gasping for breath, adjusting his tie, attempting ludicrously enough to straighten his sopping collar. "I've got to get out of here," he choked. "I can't breathe."

"Go on up. Get a breath of air. I'll join you when the march begins."

Another oath, another vicious swat at a mosquito, a yank at the wet collar so he could breathe, then the towering, melting mass of flesh gave up. Peter B. Stinson turned abruptly and stamped through the door.

He groped his way, gasping and lurching, into the dark corridors behind the altar. The bishop's sanctuary was on the other side of the church.

He found himself in a narrow hall with grimly ironed doors, tiny slits of barred windows. Here the organ pealed loudly, though the consul was too flustered to realize what it was playing.

He was confused, dazed, weighted down with a sense of doom. Just when

defeat was going to pounce upon him he did not know, but he felt it hovering in the unseen heights of darkness overhead.

Bats were flying about, and they got on his nerves as he walked that long corridor. Irremediable failure was hovering about his head in many shapes—bats, shadows, the wheezing of the organ bellows, large velvet moths, heat, dank vapor.

In his physical distress, and the tense excitement, the old consul jumped at a conclusion that had nothing to do with the wedding.

He was thinking of the girl in the jungle waiting for him with her old sloop, ready to take him to sea and plunge him into a dangerous fight with some brigand of the wilderness. The sensation of disaster lurking above him was perhaps a premonition of what was going to happen when he went on that outlandish quest. He believed he was going to be killed.

Somehow the wedding, the pealing organ, the old bishop waiting in that anteroom, praying fervently to a saint, the throng out there in the nave of the church, the terrific blaze and heat of a thousand candles, thrusting daggers of light through every niche and cranny of the ancient walls—all these details faded to a remote unreality.

The only reality was the quest that he was to go on after the wedding: the change to hunting togs, the crazed girl waiting in the bamboo jungle, the sloop in the river, the mangrove swamps of the coast, the fight that must come, the failure, the death.

As he reached the choir door he came to his senses with a start. They were playing the Wedding March!

In frantic excitement he opened the door.

Across the choir stalls and the altar platform and beyond the adobe pillars he saw the three *padres*, the bishop in full regalia with his robes sweeping the dusty floor. The great prelate was

ready to enter!

Old Stinson's bulging eyes followed the gorgeous little figure as it moved, with the attendants, down to the steps of the altar. From the door of the alcove where the consul stood he could see a good part of the audience. All the Creoles of the province were craning their necks to see the entrance of Doña Dolores and the choir boys, the censer bearers, the father, Señor Hidalgo.

Peter B. Stinson had a confused impression of two or three hundred fantastic tortoise-shell combs, the blue black coiffures, and two or three hundred shaved and powdered necks of Creole gentlemen—the élite of Todos Santos and the San Sebastian Atlantic seaboard.

A blinding holocaust of candles, a stifling draft of human breath, of strong perfume, of heated air, pressed the big consul back.

There was the procession: the brown-faced boys with their slits of eyes, their smoking censers.

And there came the bride!

How tragic she looked, like Iphegenia led to the sacrifice! A frail, ethereal wisp of a child with a bridal veil hanging in misty cascades from a giant comb!

It was just a flash of that picture which old Stinson had as, gasping audibly, fairly moaning in torture, he fell back before the suffocating draft.

Then he collected his wits. He must go in there and stand up beside the ill-fated bridegroom.

"All ready now!" He turned about. The man standing behind him whom he had thought to be the groom, was a wizened little *padre* holding a censer.

"Good God!" Stinson cried out. They would have heard him down there in the pews—had it not been for the pealing Wedding March. "*Where is he?*"

He brushed the little *padre* out of the way and dashed off for the long corridor.

He raced wildly—like an escaped puma leaping down a circus runway from his cage.

"Gregory — Dan — Dan Gregory! Where are you! We're lost! We should be standing—out there—we—"

He sheered up sharp against a wall, lurched heavily athwart an iron-hinged door, his weight banging it open with a loud crash. Down a second corridor.

"Dan! Dan! For God's sake!"

Like a Jack bursting out a box, the huge, perspiring form lurched into the sacristy.

The old *padre* was there quietly putting away the jug of wine, the silver goblets.

He looked up mildly, surprised at the consul's appearance.

"Where is he? Where is he? Do you hear me? Can't you talk? Where did he go?"

The sacristan was frightened at the sight of the wild-eyed giant of an Americano. He pointed his bony finger upward. "Is he not there—before the bishop?"

"Where did he go? When—when was he here last? Where is he now? No, no! Not up there, confound you! Not up there!" The consul fumbled for Spanish words. A frenzied jumble of English and Spanish tried to convey the simple fact: the groom had not come to the altar.

"It is scarcely two minutes—three minutes—since the young *señor* left," the sacristan said, blinking his little red eyes. "After his third goblet of wine—for which, see, he paid me handsomely." Proudly he held up a twenty-peso note.

"Search for him—everywhere. Quick! He's lost in these confounded catacombs. Get help! Get other *padres*. Do you understand? The bishop is waiting up there—and the bride is at the altar! Good God, what has happened?"

He raced back to the bishop's room. A *padre* was staring dumbly at the waiting audience. He was told the un-

believable truth. The groom was lost. He swept off, with a clacking of beads, a swish of garments, to join in the hunt. Other *padres* were told. The news spread.

But out there in the audience no one as yet knew what the trouble was. The elegant and perspiring throng saw the white-faced bride standing at the altar, her powdered cheeks streaked with tears.

They saw the old *señora*, her grandmother, staring with a hypnotic, immovable gaze at the giant comb, the mistlike veil. The ancient lady's fan, until now feverishly active, was poised, held upward to shade her face from the heat.

They saw the bishop—a sort of sun-bleached puppet, shrunk, savage, his great robes hanging limp as sails without wind, much too large for the slim skeleton of a thing inside their folds. Gray hair, like straw, mottled lips mumbling, a palsied hand holding the Book bound in beaten gold.

They saw the crimson face, bulging eyes, gasping mouth of the American consul coming to the door, and frantically scanning the sea of faces.

The Wedding March thundered to a riot of pealing chords, and then abruptly all sound was suspended. The last chord of the piece was like an incomplete burst of harmony, snuffed out by some unseen power, leaving the audience in a deathlike silence, their ears dinned by the echoes.

In the front row the grandmother of the bride brought her fan to her wizened cheek. The ivory spokes clicked shut with a whirl, a sort of hiss, turning themselves into something like a dagger.

Señor Hidalgo, who was to "give the bride," looked like a lean, crouching animal, ready to leap upon his prey. But this position, fraught with terrific latent action, remained unchanged. He, too, was like a man who had seen Medusa and was turned into a rock image.

The assembly was dumb, terror-

stricken. They could not have been more terror-stricken had they been waiting for an eruption of lava from *El Capitan* to rain down upon them. This tragedy was greater than any human understanding.

The organist, true to his trade, sought to fill in the eternity of silence with a few soft breathings of the vox humana. But the bishop put up his hand, a trembling claw.

It took a moment or two for the organist to get this signal, relayed to him from *padre* to chorister. In the interval the vox humana, in its taunting, soft tremble, seemed to be laughing ironically—human laughter—at the extraordinary comedy.

And there was one other voice in that bewildered panic-stricken assembly that laughed.

The bride looked up at the bishop. She looked up, a new light in her eyes, at the crimson, streaming face of the big American consul off there behind adobe pillars. She looked back at the graven image of a man that was her father—implacable, deadly in his rage.

She looked back to the farther edge of the assembly searching for her lover, her constabulary officer. She found the youthful, oval face, the large, animal-like eyes, the lush lips with the first down of a boy's mustache. He was there, sighing, moaning in despair, unmindful that he was elected for happiness by the gods.

The Angelus was pealing. For the aged *padre*, appointed to ring the bells, had been ordered to send forth the tidings to the street crowds as soon as the Wedding March was over.

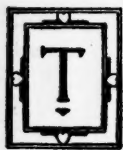
The surging crowds in the plaza set up a wild huzzaing. Their beloved Doña Dolores was being blessed with immeasurable joy. A bride, a mate, a woman coming into the kingdom of love.

That is what the planters, the *cargadores*, the shopkeepers, the mestizos, the Caribs, the negroes of Todos Santos thought.

And they were not so far wrong.
For Doña Dolores was laughing.

CHAPTER IX

MEG CAMERON'S CHAMPION



O the south of Todos Santos there is a stretch of low ground, the mangrove swamps that merge into the lagoon as far as the Barrier Reef. Ships cannot approach the shore, neither can a road be built across the land, nor are there any waterways navigable for canoes save only the tangled net work of alligator runs.

This impassable and uninhabitable land extends inland as far as the narrow gauge single track line of the Consolidated Fruit Railroad, which skirts the coast along the first contour of solid ground.

The seaward side of the track presents a wall of cane, bamboo, and intertangled vines as thick as the pillars of a house. At certain intervals there is a clearing for a track siding, a shed with galvanized iron roof, a platform generally loaded with six foot high piles of bananas.

At one of the telegraph posts, covered with moss and vines so as to seem merely a tree trunk, there is the usual closetlike shed in which the conductors of the fruit trains send in their reports to the Todos Santos terminal.

The first of these jungle stations was approachable by a road on the landward side of the track, leading from the town. The platform seemed to be deserted on the night of the great fiesta. Even the watchman had taken his family, his two mules, his wooden-wheeled *careta*, and joined the throng in the city.

There was, however, one figure there, a sort of ghost, a quiet, lurking presence, dressed in khaki so that the form merged unseen in the murky darkness of that swamp night.

It was a woman, restive, pacing

noiselessly up and down the narrow path between the station and the road, waist-high in the grass—a fitful spirit in a world of fragrant mist and fire-flies.

It was Meg Cameron, the girl who had come that afternoon to the American consulate for help.

What was the cause of her anxiety during that hour of waiting? In her talk with Consul Peter B. Stinson she had come to the definite conclusion that he was a man to be trusted. He would keep this trust, no matter what happened.

When she heard the Angelus in the San Felipe Church pealing forth the news that Doña Dolores was being given in marriage to a young Americano, she knew beyond any shadow of a doubt that in a few minutes the consul would have slipped off to the outskirts of the town, changed his clothes, got his horse and gun, and taken that road which followed the C. F. Railway tracks along the edge of the mangroves.

There was no doubt in her mind about all this. He would come.

The Angelus was continuing its resonant pealing. In a few more minutes a horseman would be coming down the dry dust of the road.

But, despite the certain conviction that the consul would keep his promise, she was the very spirit of distraction and fear as she paced up and down the shell path waiting for her champion to come. The cause was this:

She believed that Peter Stinson would fail in the task she was going to assign to him. Failure was written all over his huge, flabby face, his drooping shoulders, his pudgy, trembling fingers. He was a bit of flotsam down there on the beach of Todos Santos, who had spent many years keeping a miserable little "general store" selling beads and pocket knives and dry goods to mestizos and Jamaican negroes and Indians.

Furthermore she had learned from the Carib who had driven her into town

in that thatch-covered *caretta* that the American consul was not much of a fighter. He had kept the peace with the citizens of Todos Santos because of their respect for the American flag. He was a big man, and little guanacos, even when excited with white-eye, did not like to meddle with him. But as for his marksmanship—

He went hunting on occasions for ocelots, tapirs, and deer, and never came back with anything but big stories of wounded and escaping beasts. The stuffed toucans and parrots in his store were purchased from Carib villages along the coast. He never shot any wild life at all.

A brave man unquestionably. For he had responded to the summons of a woman in distress without a flinch. But he was doomed to certain failure—a failure which in this case would mean his death. Meg Cameron was almost of a mind to send him home again, advising him that the danger was too great, the task she had set for him impossible.

As she heard the Angelus of the San Felipe Mission she wondered just why those soft distant peals worked such torture in her whole being. Did they not signalize the fact that the consul would be free of his duties as "best man," and that he would soon come?

A skyrocket bursting in the air high above the tiled roofs of the city sent a shudder through her. The sparks were so brilliant as to sear her eyesight. They, too, were a signal that her elected champion was coming. Why did she hate that sight so?

She herself would have been unable to tell just why. Perhaps it had something to do with that wedding. But what did the wedding matter to her? She had seen the young American—her countryman—and the memory of those sharp gray eyes was still vivid in her mind. They were the kind of eyes that were needed on this quest.

She remembered his thin, powerful, steady hand. It was the kind of hand

she wanted to do this work. She could not help comparing them to the huge, pudgy, shapeless paws of the old consul.

Perhaps that was why she hated the glory of those skyrockets, the lilting harmony of that Angelus. She had chosen one man, but she wanted another! She wanted one who had been promised in marriage to a young Creole girl. Well, that was the end of it. She would put him out of her mind.

She would, that is to say, if it were humanly possible.

But, as she heard the soft clipclap of horse's feet on the dirt road, she was still evoking that lean, powerful figure—the young American. She thought she saw him staring at her: baffled, incredulous, bewitched. He had fallen in love with her—she knew that well enough.

Out of the steamy darkness the form of a horseman emerged. It was a slender form, abnormally tall because of the shadow, dilated it seemed by the strata of swamp mist through which she saw him.

He was in evening dress, seated in a saddle, a white Panama hat with brim turned down over his face. She thought it strange that the consul had not taken time to change to jungle clothes after the wedding.

The man came to her. A thrill of surprise, of misgiving, gripped her. She backed away.

This was not the consul!

"Is that you—Meg Cameron?" a voice came out of the thick darkness.

"Yes. But—who are you?"

"You expect Stinson? Well, he won't be here. He's tied up with a little diplomatic work back there at the Mission. Won't get away for an hour. By that time you'll have to get aboard your sloop. I'm going with you instead," he announced.

"You? Who are you?" she cried.

The same fear that had gripped her turned into some other sort of violent emotion that brought the moisture to

her forehead. She stared fiercely, her lips parted, her breath was suspended.

"Don't you remember my voice?" the man said.

"Yes—but—"

"I'm going with you. I'll do what you want. I've got a gun."

She was speechless, her heart thumping wildly. After a moment she cried out: "Are you the man with the gray eyes—"

"You saw me at the consul's."

"The *doña's* bridegroom!"

"No. The wedding is off."

"I thank God!" she burst out, her whole frame giving vent to the exclamation as if with a heartfelt gasp of joy.

He came to her.

She did not back away this time. She stood there reaching her hands across the tops of the tall guinea grass.

He took them. In the next moment she had pressed through the grass and melted into his arms.

CHAPTER X

JONAH AND THE SLOOP



CRIMSON moon peeped over the shoulder of *El Capitan* in the east and flooded the mangrove swamps with a feverish sort of light. The broad expanse of swamp that was claimed neither by sea nor land, seemed to be sweltering in a heat that, like the heat of a fever, was really a chill.

With the girl seated behind him, Gregory rode his horse along the sandy road that followed the track grade through forests of coconuts, bamboos, mahogany.

Abruptly they came upon the river, the Rio Esquinta, winding like a silvery snake in its black, mile-wide bed of mud.

At the point where the road mounted to a levee, the levee which guarded the C. F. tracks, the jungle growth reached the very edge of the brackish water.

The tide now was high, covering acres of bullrushes, flooding the banks so that the roots of the trees and their giant vines were immersed in black water.

The sloop was there, moored to two mahogany trunks, her mast and stays impossible of detection in the tangle of bamboo and vines. Even by the light of day it would have been easy to look straight at her mooring place and fail to see her.

There was no need of a lantern. The deck was flecked with bright spots of moonlight filtering through the vines. The peak and throat halyards were cleated just aft of the mast. A yard or two of rope left over after the lowering of the gaff was neatly coiled.

The sheets were likewise coiled in mats, ready to run out at a moment's notice. The mainsail, jib and fore-staysail were ready to hoist, the latter gathered with a single stop. Meg Cameron had not taken the time to stow them. In a word, the craft was left just as she had landed.

Gregory hoisted the mainsail with the help of a capstan.

A faint puff or two of wind from the sea swept up from the marshes, sighed through the palms, fluttered the huge expanse of canvas, as Gregory cleated the halyards in place. The girl meanwhile cast off the stern line and then groped her way, wading in ooze to the partially submerged mahogany trunk twenty yards forward of the bowsprit. As Gregory coiled the lines she climbed aboard.

Already the current had swung the bow around, the mainsail filled, the boom swung out with a rattle of rings, block and tackle.

The girl ran aft immediately to the tiller, ordered Gregory to haul in the sheet, and as the old hulk leaned over to the pleasant influence of the wind, she sent her quartering across the broad river.

"I'm warning you before we go any farther," she said calmly, jumping into

the heart of her message, "they'll try to kill you."

"I understand all about it," Dan said just as calmly. "The consul told me everything."

Out of the red mist the stumps of mahoganies loomed like ghosts rising

scarcely tell whether or not they were gaining against that steady temporale blowing over the shoulder of *El Capitan*.

The dim landmarks showed the laborious progress. From this palm tree to the next, a hundred yards; from



"IS THAT YOU—MEG CAMERON?" A VOICE
CAME OUT OF THE THICK DARKNESS

from the water. Meg Cameron, not daring to venture too close to the foul ground, came about on the new tack. She ordered her mate to slack off on the jib sheet.

The mainsail luffed, banged loudly in the deathlike stillness. Gregory, following her orders, trimmed down the jib sheet. All sails filled away and with a squeak or two of timbers the craft leaned over and quartered back.

The tack had gained them a furlong down stream, the tide aiding against the sea breeze into which they were sailing.

"They'll take a long time getting treasure off the island," the girl said. "We'll get there in time. No doubt about that. But they'll fight. One of the *hombres* is a murderer. I knew it because of his eyes: little glittering eyes like a rat's. I saw him poke his head out of the brush. There he was watching me like a rat looking out of a hole."

Again the loud swing of the boom across the deck, the slatting of canvas, and the big lumbering hulk was brought about. Tack after tack, and they ate their way by slow degrees down the river, though Dan could

that hummock of land to a rush-covered spit, a furlong; from a rock like a giant alligator to the next palm—that was the schedule.

"Was the consul afraid?" the girl asked suddenly.

"Not a bit of it. He considered himself elected. A sacred duty. He was the luckiest man in the world—"

"But he didn't believe there was really any treasure."

"I am inclined to think he didn't!"

"And you—"

"I don't care if there's treasure or not."

"Then why are you coming? I thought you had promised your life to Doña Dolores?"

"I did. But she released me. By the grace of Heaven she happens to have found her life mate among her own people. I set the little caged thing free."

"And you—"

"I set myself free in the same act."

The river widened. Finding herself in an immensity of smooth black water, Meg Cameron held the course for a mile's tack. It brought them far out in the lagoon. The old hulk leaned to the close hauled canvas and sent a long trail of phosphorescence aft. The moonlight caught the glitter of a school of flying fish.

"What strange miracle brought you here, in the consul's place?" Meg Cameron asked.

"He wasn't your man. He can't fire a gun. And he thought you were crazy talking about a treasure."

Dan imagined the girl flushing hotly.

"Crazy!" she fumed. "A life of searching and studying by my poor father. He can read these Mayan symbols like English."

"Just how sure were you that there was anything in that well you found? The consul said you didn't have time to go down."

The girl replied in a quiet tone: "Hard alee."

Gregory jumped for the sheet. Again a clatter of boom and tackle and block broke the universe of silence. Seven pelicans, until now unaware of the approach of the big boat, cried out in fright, and sailed away, in a straight single file down the moon path.

"I know there's treasure there—because my father knew it," she said. "He read Mayan manuscripts in Dresden, Paris, and Spain. He had checked it up in the stone shafts brought by archaeologists to Mexico City. He knew it existed. He knew what was there—onyx, turquoise, gold vessels sacrificed to those Mayan gods—"

"But if some one had found it—before?" Dan asked doubtfully.

"The well was completely covered

with the jungle. Not a trail there from any point of the compass. The stone shafts were so covered with moss and vines that they looked like dead tree trunks. I got into the densest part of it, and had only one shaft of sunlight that shone in from the dense foliage. This I shot into the well with a hand glass. It made a spot of light way down in the depths. There were piles of ooze-covered things—"

"Rocks?"

"Perhaps. But I believe they were gold urns."

"Is that all the proof—"

"That's all," she admitted frankly.

"Now do you want to jeopardize your life?"

"Did I tell you that I think I'm the luckiest man on earth," Dan answered, "treasure or no treasure?"

The long starboard tack brought them toward the opening of the barrier reef. The thunder of surf had now become an incessant undertone to their soft speech.

Shoreward they could see the lights of Todos Santos. But there was no audible sound from that direction; no more skyrocketing, nor booming of the Presidio gun, nor huzzaing of people, nor peal of mission bells.

The row of lights across the blue mist was the only mark of the meeting of the sierra and the black lagoon. A silent, brooding, evil town it seemed now. Gregory wondered what would happen to him if he had to set foot on its streets again.

Silent and forsaken as it looked from out there on the lagoon, there was no doubt about the commotion that was going on within its narrow alleys, its thick-walled houses, its littered *patios*. At that very hour every nook and corner of that town—Gregory knew well enough—was being searched for the runaway bridegroom.

The girl steered for the mouth of the lagoon where the old stone tower, Santa Cruz Light, marked the opening—a narrow channel running due east

from lagoon to sea.

By a perverse circumstance the tempest, which is ordinarily a norther, had hauled off toward the east, so that to pass the bar the girl found herself balked by a headwind.

Bringing the wind on the beam, she gave her craft all the wind possible, and with the bow wave piling up phosphorescence she sent the sloop into the wind again in an attempt to pass the lighthouse under her own momentum.

Meg kept her eye glued to the sail, but in her eagerness to negotiate the narrow channel without a tack, she sailed too close.

The sails banged loudly as she luffed; the boat paid off a little, filled away, got a little more headway, luffed, and then hung irresolutely in the strong seawind.

"Will you make it?" Gregory asked anxiously.

"Doesn't look like it. She's all aback," the girl said.

"It would be awkward to get horsed up there on the Todos Santos beach," he observed grimly. "I left the wedding without any explanation. Old Hidalgo is looking for me, I dare say."

But right there, as the old sloop caught the first smell of the breakers, she changed her mind. There was the slatting of the old patched sail; the boom swung across, then back again to place, poised for a moment as if to tantalize the two wretched mortals with a promise to accept a puff of wind; then abruptly it hung dead.

The bedeviled old ship seemed very definitely opposed to leaving her home port—Todos Santos.

Once that far in, it was impossible now to let her drift sternwise before the wind and keep her in the channel. As it was, the confounded old tub was paying off sufficiently to take the wind and smash head-on into the reef.

The sail already being close-hauled, Meg Cameron had nothing left but to help her to pay off—since that was quite patently the ship's desire. As

soon as the sail filled, the bow swung around, and in the next second the boom crashed over with the wind astern.

In gybing she shook every rotten old timber in her hull, straining the windward stays with an angry groan.

Gregory was knocked headlong to the scuppers. When he picked himself up dazed and bleeding at the forehead, he saw that the perverse bewitched old boat was heading like a race horse straight for Todos Santos!

The populace of the seaport, in a frenzy of madness searching for their lost bridegroom, would have been very much delighted if some chance Carib fisherman had told them that a man in the white stiff shirt, black trousers, and patent leather pumps, was sailing out there by Santa Cruz Light, trying frantically to cross the bar!

What would have happened if old Hidalgo—the wronged, the humiliated, maniacal in his fury—had stood off from shore in his power boat and given chase? What would have happened to young Gregory? What would have happened to the girl who had, sirenlike, called him away from his wedding under the very nose of the great Xallaci, Bishop of Zacatula?

Once she had shaken off the violent convulsion of that jib and steadied herself the sloop settled down on her course sailing before the wind as fast as ever she had sailed. The girl at the helm, however, was astonishingly calm. Dan believed that it was the calmness of desperation. "Damn me if she isn't heading straight for the pier!" he exclaimed to himself.

But this was not the case. Meg Cameron was merely enjoying the triumph of feeling that great lumbering vessel responding again to the touch of her hand, the triumph of any helmsman who, having lost steerage way, regains it again.

Again the girl sent her into the channel. Again the old ship wallowed, hung in the wind, refused point-blank

to gain another inch.

They tried again and again. They approached the opening on the starboard tack, then went back into the lagoon, plunged into the channel with the wind on the port. A third time the helmsman even tried the dangerous experiment of coming about in the middle of the narrow channel, and all but ran afoul of the coral ground.

But for all this, the ship simply would not go past that lighthouse. When she was brought back she sailed as neatly as you please, the very paragon of good nature and docility. But then once she was headed across the bar and got the first touch of that swell, she balked.

The bedeviled old craft might just as well have talked like Balaam's ass: "I *won't* go past the light. I won't go past the light! No matter what you do to me, belabor me, whip me, kick me, curse me, I won't go past the light."

She seemed to be true to the country under whose flag she sailed. She was true to Todos Santos, the home port. She was groaning out with every swing of her boom and strain of her stays: "There's a Jonah on board. I'll sail anywhere with you, *señorita*, but not with that Jonah. The whole town is looking for him. The whole country wants him. I won't take him out to sea. Not I! I quit right here!"

And quit she did.

The girl at the wheel was not quite so calm now. Dan could see her standing there in the full glare of the moon, her face deathly pale, her brow furrowed, her teeth digging nervously at her lip.

He went to her and took her arm. The khaki shirt waist was sopping wet. She was limp, as if she had been through a terrific physical and mental combat.

"I'll try again," she said weakly.

She sent the devil ship toward Santa Cruz light for it must have been the tenth time.

"Not I!" The ship fairly shook with laughter when the sails luffed. "Not I! *Todos Santos wants her bridegroom and she'll get him—if I have anything to say about it!*"

CHAPTER XI

THE SEARCH



HE crowds were still in the plaza. But they stood in idle groups, flabbergasted. Something had happened that had shaken the very walls of the city. A temblor—as they call those earthquakes—growing from the bowels of the earth, could not have given Todos Santos a more thorough shaking.

The venders of guavas and prickly pears and sweet cakes could find no more purchasers. The hawkahs stood on street corners, their toy balloons bobbing aimlessly over their heads as devoid of purpose or reason as any man in that throng. Even the hairless dogs stopped chasing each other over the dry grass of the plaza and looked up questioningly at the human beings, as if asking what dreadful thing had happened!

On the cathedral steps swarthy faced hatless men in evening dress, gesticulated wildly with each other. Their wives and daughters were pouring out of the glaring maw of the church, fluttering their fans, their huge combs bobbing up and down like the crests of excited birds.

Inside the church a peculiar drama was coming to its crisis. The Bishop of Zacatula was in his room with his Indians and *padres*. It was the room where the bridal couple were to have affixed their signatures to the marriage contract.

Hidalgo stood there a towering form with blood on his lower lip. Ordinarily he was eloquent with his hands when he spoke; his syllables were formed not only with his mouth, but with his shoulders, his body, a nodding

of the gaunt head. But now he was immovable, taut as a bow string, his eyebrows a thin low line of determination and fury.

The American consul entered the room. Fire was in his eyes. He seemed drunk, as disordered in his mind as in his attire. His collar was unbuttoned and stood out grotesquely under one ear. His hair was rumped. He was trembling at the lips when he faced Hidalgo.

"We can't find him, so help me God!" he cried. "He's been shot. Some one's shot him—in the back. Some filthy skunk—and they've taken his body—"

"It is a lie," Hidalgo said. "Not a man in the country would dare make an attempt on his life. They know his sort too well. He is a gunfighter like his murderous brother. No. He ran away. Don't lie. He ran away. I knew he would not give himself up in marriage. He disgraced us. He did not want this marriage. He insulted my blood!"

"It is best as it is," the old bishop said in a thin, calm voice. "God does not will this marriage. He has shown it. God does not will the continuance of this octopus—your American trade—in our land. Let the trade relations be severed. I shall sever them!"

"Let them be severed," Hidalgo repeated with an implacable calm. He took up the papers, the marriage license, the contract, the deeds of gift which his lawyers had made out as a dowry to the American. Then with a suppressed but furious energy as if he were ripping a human being asunder, he tore the documents to pieces and threw them into the consul's face.

The American backed away, dumfounded at the suddenness of this insult, and then stood his full height, his face drained of color.

Before he could gasp a word in answer, Hidalgo burst out, his arms stiffening at his sides, his hands clenched

and whitened at the thick knuckles:

"The Hidalgo blood has been stained. But I will wipe out the stain, *por Dios*. I will have the man shot before my daughter's eyes."

The wizened little bishop held up his hand. "The Hidalgo blood is noble blood. Let the stain be wiped out, but not in here. I wash my hands of this scandal. The church will stay aloof. We do not make wars. We make peace. But this is not a time for peace."

The consul choked over an oath. "Good God—you mean—"

"I mean that it is the wish of the church that the Hidalgo name come out of this scandal unscathed."

"Are you making an international affair out of this farce?" the consul shot back.

The thin mottled lips of the ancient prelate tightened in a grin. "If it means that, let it mean that."

There was the consul, unable, even with the power of the States behind him, to temporize this breach. It was a breach against the Hidalgo blood, and therefore against the whole country. Even the wizened old bishop, purblind, with a foot in the grave, with passions little more than dead ashes, was awakened to a vehement fury, a fury that was greater than his fear of the United States.

And there was Dan Gregory, an American citizen, in jeopardy of his life, the target of all this Latin venom and outraged pride. What was going to happen to that boy? What had already happened?

"I'll stay in this country until I find that boy—or his body!" the old fellow said.

"You may stay here for that," Hidalgo said softly. "I would like you, *señor*, to stay for that. And I myself will promise to deliver his body to you."

There was no doubt about what this statement meant. The Hidalgo might have said: "Wait here until I wipe out

this insult and kill your countryman, then you may take his carcass away with you."

A few hours later, Peter B. Stinson was sitting among the show cases, boxes, serapes, beads, fans, and cutlery of his general store. He seemed for the first time oblivious of the stinging insects that filled the low ceilinged room. He was engrossed by far more serious tortures.

He did not join in the hunt for Dan Gregory, for the simple reason that he knew perfectly where he was. He was so certain that he did not even take the trouble to visit the roadside cantina on the edge of town where he had intended to change his evening dress, and get his gun and horse. It would have been a dangerous procedure—perhaps resulting in putting Hidalgo on the trail—dangerous and unnecessary.

Meanwhile the search was going on. Poses of riders had been clattering up and down the street in front of his store on their unkempt pintos. A residue of tatterdemalions stopped at the store, hurled imprecations, threw stones and mud at the adobe walls.

Peter B. Stinson sat there, helpless and alone, praying only to the gods that his young countryman had got out to sea in time. As for his store he was beyond worry. They could tear it down about his ears, and make reparations for the damage later. That's all the good it would do them.

The oaths and mud-slinging increased. A stone broke a window. A threatening, snarling crowd gathered, brandishing machetes, yelling drunkenly.

For a moment it looked as if Peter B. Stinson might lose something besides his store.

He went upstairs for a shotgun, loaded it, and then stepped out on the balcony above.

In the few moments he had taken to do this, something had happened.

The threatened attack did not come.

Instead the mob broke up abruptly. Groups of men separated. There were arguments, quarrelsome, excited, wild. From one of the groups the terrified little clerk who worked for the consul picked himself up from the gutter where he had been thrown, and without stopping to shake off the mud from his torn clothes he darted into a side door of the general store.

The groups began to dissolve. They started down the street on a run as if some one had thrown a bomb in their midst—a bomb that had not yet gone off.

Stinson noticed that they were all heading down a narrow alley for the water front.

He hastened downstairs and met the grimy clerk who stood gasping and praying to the saints, his forehead bleeding, an eye blackened by a blow, a sleeve of his alpaca coat completely ripped from his arm.

"What the devil's happened?" Stinson cried.

"They were about to kick me to the death, *señor!*" he wailed. "Even though I mak' the oath I know nossing of you Americanos—and your affairs—"

"And why didn't they finish you?" the other asked.

"Some one from the beach—he come runnin' and excite'. He bring the news."

"What news?" Stinson experienced a qualm of understanding.

"The boat—the sail boat which she is mak' tack up and down the Lagoon—"

The truth struck Stinson in a blinding flash. So poor Gregory had blundered—he had been all this time trying to get out to sea!

"Tell me the rest—*pronto*—get yourself together, confound you! What's happened?"

"*Señor maestro!*" he wailed. "I tell everything. Ees terrible night for you Americanos! I bring the evil tidings. The young Americano—he is

out there." He pointed a trembling, yellow thumb over his shoulder to the beach.

"I know. I know. But have they got him?"

"*Sí, señor.* I mean—not yet—but they get him *pronto*. The keeper of the Santa Cruz light, he is come ashore by rowboat and he is bring news of what he saw thees night. The young Americano—with white vest and black breeches—the bridegroom—out there, sailing on old sloop, with Americano girl.

"The Hidalgo is learn' the news. He is ride like hell to the sea wall. The ship is there with yellow sail, and they mak' for the bar. But the temporale is blow' too strong. The ship no can mak' get-away!"

He paused, seeing his master sink into a chair, white-faced, muttering an oath.

"What happened then—the posse—Hidalgo—what did they do?"

"They ride to sea wall, *señor*, and the Hidalgo he is stand on sea wall with the Comandante Morada. The Hidalgo, like vulture, looks out to thees Barrier Reef. The moon she is shine bright.

"The sail is there and the ship. But the *comandante* he say the ship she is nosing to worry. Ees only the ship Chita which American girl sail up and down coast, since long time like fisher *hombre*. Nossing to mak' noise about, he say."

"And they didn't go out to find who was on the sloop?" the consul asked feverishly.

"Jus' wan minute, *señor*, I beg, while I mak' explain. The Hidalgo ees look like vulture watching. He says, looking through spyglass, 'I see wan *señorita* and wan *hombre*.' He mak' suspicious. '*Por Dios!*' he cry, 'I will send out my launch.'

"So he tells the *comandante* to send

out corporal for find out. And he send ozzier man back to his house to get Doña Dolores. 'She will see thees man shoot down before her eyes!' he mak' oath in terrible voice."

"And they put out after them?" Stinson said weakly.

"Wait, *señor*. The corporal ees afraid. 'The gringo,' he says, 'will shoot me to death with hees bullet.' So the *alcalde* says, '*Bueno*, you and your whole squad will go out with the guns!'"

"And they went?"

Evidently the clerk had some aversion—no doubt inherited from his Indian ancestors—to the bringing of evil tidings.

"Ees all I know, *señor*," he pleaded, kneading his muddy, bleeding hands. "I run here to you. I find the crowd out there. They pounce on me like dogs on poor chicken. I tell them the news—for to save my miserable life. They forget me. I pick myself up. I—"

"Yes—I know the rest."

The consul took up his binoculars and ran out again to the balcony. All the population of the city seemed to have swarmed to the sea wall, like ants to a piece of sugar.

"May the saints help the young Americano!" the clerk was saying humbly. "The *alcalde* ees cruel man. He will mak' torture."

"How many men put out in the launch?"

"Seven men and the corporal," the other said, again wringing his hands. "*Por Dios*, ees no hope."

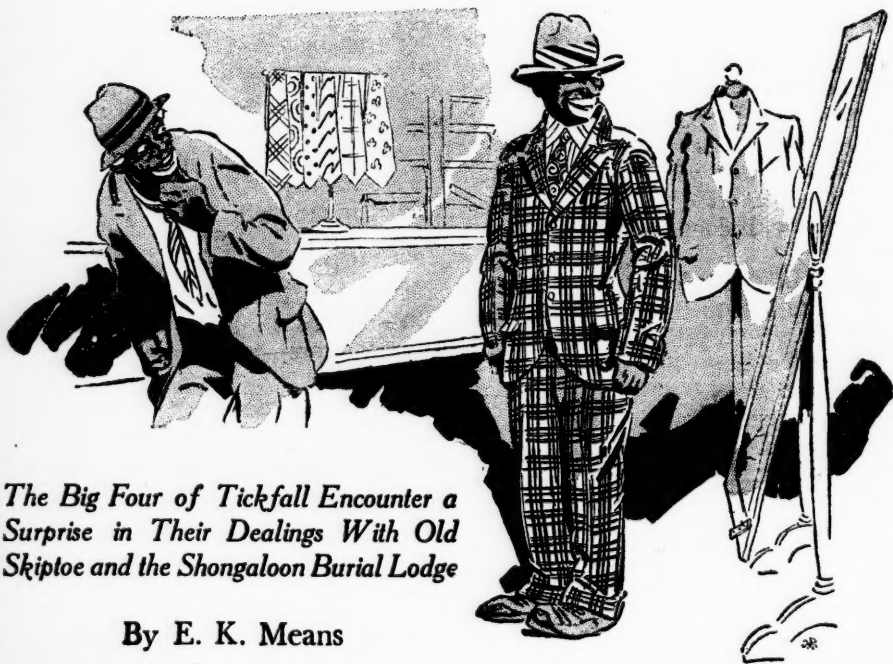
"Eight men in all. H-m. A squad of soldiers," Stinson reflected. "Well, that's not so bad."

"I am sorry for the young Americano," the clerk wailed.

"I'm not so sure but that you better be sorry for your squad," the consul said grimly.

THE CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT OF THIS VIVID SERIAL WILL APPEAR
IN THE SEPTEMBER MUNSEY

Grave Clothes



The Big Four of Tickfall Encounter a Surprise in Their Dealings With Old Skiptoe and the Shongaloon Burial Lodge

By E. K. Means



HE Rev. Vinegar Atts came into the Henscratch hang-out with the rolling gait of a black bear, and sat down at the table without his customary morning greeting to his three friends. His bald head gleamed like polished mahogany in the light of the window, and the two tufts of gray hair over his ears made him resemble a fat-faced mule wearing a blind bridle. His lips stuck out; he was pouty and peeved.

"Whut you reckon I met up wid in dis town?" he wailed. "A bunch of niggers is tryin' to steal our dope! Dey wus talkin' to me about gwine to organize a info'mation bureau."

"We had one of dem things in dis town once," Figger Bush remarked. "It wus a ugly, long-yearred jackace dat a feller fotch up from Mexico fer his chillun to play wid; but it brayed

so scandalous dat it wus wuss dan all de mill whistles an' gin whistles in town, an' de white folks kicked on it because it wus a noosunce."

"I ain't talkin' about no burro," Vinegar told him. "I said a info'mation bureau."

"Whut in de name of mud is dat?" Figger Bush inquired.

"It is a place whar a nigger goes an' axes questions," Vinegar explained. "Some niggers don't know whut direction straight up is, so dey come to de info'mation bureau, an' de feller at de table looks at de road map. He shows 'em dat it's a good road widout no detours, an' dey kin jes' start from whar dey is at an' go."

"Ef we kin git a cullud infawmation bureau in dis town dat would really infawm anybody, it would shore be a louder tick in Tickfall dan I ever heard yit," Skeeter Butts remarked.

"I been tryin' to find out somepin all my life, an' I ain't never found out nothin' yit."

"But whut do a nigger want to know?" Figger inquired, showing that he was still unenlightened. "I thought niggers knowed eve'ything. I feels like I does; leastwise, I knows a plenty."

"Gawsh!" Vinegar bawled. "Of co'se, a nigger jes' nachelly knows eve'ything, but he always wants somebody else to tell him. He likes to git his advices. He wants to know whar de cotehouse is at, an' whar he kin buy a drink, an' whut day comes atter Sunday, an' had he oughter marry a chocolate blonde or a brunette."

"Huh!" Figger responded. "Whut's de use of a organize like dat? We done already got it. Ain't we here? Ain't de Big Fo' give out advices fer all de las' pas' endurin' years?"

"Dat is whut I axed dat nigger who wus talkin' to me," Vinegar declared; "an' he explained his reason pretty good."

"Who wus dat coon?" Skeeter asked.

"It wus Mike Mule," Vinegar told them. "Mike said dat all his life he had craved to wear sporty clothes an' look like a gent. He never had done enough wuck to make enough money to buy good clothes, an' whut he did git to wear he soon wore out by de wuck he done. So now he's gwine to git him a orfice job whut ain't so hard on clothes an' pays better."

"Do he mean to charge money?" Figger asked incredulously.

"Yep," Vinegar answered. "He said dat our bizness wus a advice bureau, an' we couldn't take no pay, because advice is free; but he aims to start a info'mation bureau, like a kawledge an' sich like, an' you got to pay fer whut you gits."

"Whut's de diffunce between infawmation an' advice?" Figger wanted to know.

"Ef a feller wants to know whar to go, you don't advice him, you info-

mation him," Vinegar explained; "but ef he wants to know whut to do, you advice him."

"An' atter he gits de advice on what to do, he is infawmed, ain't he?" Figger asked, clawing in perplexity at his woolly head. "I don't see no great big diffunce."

"Me, neither," Pap Curtain snarled; "an' up to now de Tickfall blacks ain't know no diffunce. Dey hadn't ought to be teached any diffunce. It bothers deir mind. We shore hab drawed a heap of muddle-headed coons axin' fer he'p in de las' pas' years gone by. Eve'y time a cullud man gits a new notion, he don't know whut to do wid it ontill he comes an' 'terrogates us. Huh! Look whut we got on our hands right now!"

They all turned to see what had interrupted Pap's remarks, and they knew at once why his argument had come to a quick close. The man who had just come in was a queer old party with a long, thick body and short duck legs that were just long enough to reach to the ground. Much hoeing in the cotton field had sadly stooped his shoulders. Much squinting in the sun had made countless tiny wrinkles on his face. Many years had sprinkled his hair with gray, and much pride had caused him to sprout and cultivate a little toothbrush mustache.

The Big Four could see at a glance that the aged stranger had shed his overalls to come to town, and that the clothes he wore had not been put on often, and then only when some brother member of his lodge or church had "hauled off an' died."

"Huh!" Vinegar grunted, and then the four sages waited in silence.

The little old man advanced cautiously. He had lived so long in the woods and fields that he had acquired the trick of the wild creature of the jungle, which stops and looks before venturing into unfamiliar environments. His collar was about four sizes too large for him; and as he paused

and peered at the four men he seemed to stretch his neck like a turtle and stick out his head, first on one side, then on the other.

Then he looked at the Big Four and attempted a smile. They grinned back, and Vinegar Atts said in a booming voice which made the timid little man jump and shook the rafters of the building:

"Mawnin', brudder! Come over an' tell us whut name to call you by!"

"Eve'ybody, white an' black, calls me Skiptoe," the stranger said, as he came to the table where they were sitting. "Is you-all de Big Fo'?"

"Yes, suh, we is."

"I come all de way to town to git you to he'p me," Skiptoe went on. "I am sho' glad to meet yo' 'quaintance!"

"Does you crave infawmation or advice?" Figger Bush demanded.

"Bofe."

"Dis am de place to git 'em," Vinegar said with deep satisfaction. "I'm glad our repitation has gone abroad; an' yo' jedgment in dis matter shows dat you's a man of grace an' gumption. Tell us yo' troubles!"

II

"I COME down here as a cormittee of one from de Shongaloon Burial Lodge," Skiptoe began. "I want you fellers to he'p me select a suit of clothes fer a dead man."

"You don't need no advice to do dat," Vinegar remarked. "Dead folks all wear either white or black clothes. Who is dis here deader—male or female?"

"He is a ol' man," Skiptoe informed them.

"Black!" Vinegar said. "Git him a black suit an' lay him in de boneyard. Let him rest till Gabriel toots a toot or two on his hawn."

"But we want somepin stylish an' showy," Skiptoe suggested.

"Black is still in style at fun'erals," Vinegar said impatiently. "It's de fashionable mournin' color. It's a em-

blem of death an' de grave, an' a sign of de sorer an' sympathy of de mourners, if any."

"Dar ain't no law ag'in' a feller buyin' some yuther color fer his grave clothes, is dar?" Skiptoe inquired.

"Naw, suh," Vinegar replied, a little doubtfully. "I reckon dey's all about de same price, an' I s'pose a feller oughter be allowed to wear any kind of glad rags he wants when he makes positively his last an' final appearance on de stage; but he would look kind of onnachel ef he wus dressed in red, white, an' blue, fer ninstance, or somepin like dat. A feller don't crave to go an' meet his Maker all dressed up like a stick of pep'mint candy or a awnin' in front of a dago bananer sto'."

"Whut would be yo' guess at whut a real stylish, up-to-date coffin suit would cost?" Skiptoe inquired.

"I don't know," Vinegar said. "Mebbe you could git a reduction in de case of a ol' man corp'."

"Would you fellers wish to come uptown an' he'p me pick out a suit?" Skiptoe asked. "I seen one suit in a show winder whut looked awful good to me, but I would like to hab yo' advice on dat."

"Come on, niggers—le's see him through!" Skeeter exclaimed. "I'd like to know whut is Brudder Skiptoe's notion about whut is a real stylish coffin suit."

So the five men rose and walked in a leisurely way up the street to a little cheap clothing store, the customers of which were colored people and poor whites. Nothing in the shop cost much, and nothing was worth the price asked for it.

They came to a full stop in front of the show window, and Skiptoe pointed to an outfit displayed inside. He indicated the wonder in silence, but his manner had the pride of an arctic explorer demonstrating his discovery of the North Pole.

The four men gazed upon the astounding exhibit with a shudder. The

pattern of the coat and trousers was a black and white check so hot that one could fry a catfish on it, and the coat was creased up the sides as if it was made over a cracker box. There was a fancy waistcoat of dark purple, and every visible inch of it was covered with long, thin horses and dogs engaged in a wild, leggy race to somewhere. It was a debatable question whether the dogs were chasing the horses or the horses were trying to trample the dogs.

Under the waistcoat was a plaid shirt with a smash and clash of color which made one think that such a combination could be achieved only when lightning struck the rainbow and made gumbo soup out of the spectrum. Above the sartorial display was a two-gallon slouch hat with a band of Roman stripe as wide as a man's hand.

"My good gawsh!" Pap Curtain howled. "Is dis here it?"

"Dis here is it," Skiptoe said solemnly.

"Look at dat coffin hat!" Figger Bush whooped. "Ain't it a noble size? A corp' could tote his immortal soul to heaven in his hat!"

"I'll need a whole month to git over the shock," Vinegar Atts gasped feebly, trying to stir up a breeze by slapping at his face with a big fat hand. "Somebody fan me wid a brick! Lawd save me, I guess I better go up to de Shoofly Church an' say a few prayers fer de preservation of my life! Dis here sight has mighty nigh kilt me."

"It do fill up yo' eye," Skiptoe agreed.

"It done knocked my eye out," Skeeter wailed. "It 'pears to me like my eyes ain't seein' right. Sho'ly dat suit in dat winder don't look like whut I thinks I's seein', do it?"

"Le's git away from here, niggers, befo' dat thing gits out of dat winder an' bites us!" Pap Curtain snarled.

Skiptoe appeared to be utterly deaf to this vocal demonstration of disapproval. He was simply hypnotized by

that monstrosity of a costume. His eyes were fixed in an unflinching stare, and his mouth hung open in voiceless admiration.

"I think dat is whut we want, brudders," he said finally. "I figger dat dis here is de sort of grave clothes dat a lodge oughter choose fer a dead friend."

"Good Lawd, Skiptoe!" Skeeter exclaimed. "You ain't look to me like de kind of nigger whut would do such foolishness as to buy a suit like dis fer a dead an' defenseless corp'. De dead man's fambly will sho'ly git mad an' kick."

"I ain't foolin'," Skiptoe assured them. "I say jes' whut I really mean; an' as fer de fambly an' friends, I's tryin' to pick out somepin dat will please 'em immense."

"All right!" replied Skeeter desperately. "Don't pay no mind to my few an' fible remarks. Jes' go ahead an' cormit dis here crime!"

"You brudders come in wid me, an' let me find out how much dem clothes cost," Skiptoe requested. "I bet dat sto'keeper wants all de money in de worl' fer it!"

"Stop right dar," Vinegar Atts ordered sharply. "I ain't gwine to be guilty of no mo' participation in dis here terrible sin. You tell me dat you are tryin' to pick out a burial suit fer a dead nigger, an' I knows wid all my heart an' all my mind dat dis suit ain't a fitten one. I ain't gwine to let you go back to Shongaloon an' repote dat de Revun Vinegar Atts he'ped you seleck dat trousseau!"

"I won't blame you niggers," Skiptoe promised, "ef de lodge faults me fer choosin' wrong."

"We argufy dis way, Skiptoe," Skeeter explained. "A coffin suit fer a old nigger oughter harmonize wid de complexion of de corp', de shade of his hair, de color of de box dey put him in, an' things like dat. Now a nigger is black, an' all his kinnery is black, an' all de berefted friends is black, an'

death is a black myst'ry, an' de grave is a black hole in de ground; an' thereto' an' accawdin', his suit of clothes oughter be black."

"How come you don't send fer yo' lodge member an' let him select his own grave clothes?" Pap Curtain demanded.

"It cain't be did," Skiptoe said.

"Why cain't it be did?" Pap insisted.

"Because de man I'm gittin' dese clothes fer is dead," Skiptoe replied impressively.

"How long is he been dead?" Pap inquired.

"Two years," Skiptoe informed them.

The four men stood there paralyzed by this astounding statement. No such incident had ever before been presented to their intelligence—buying burial clothes for a man who had been dead two years. All at the same time, the Big Four conceived the idea that they were dealing with a lunatic. Vinegar Atts seized Skiptoe's arm and said gently:

"Come along wid us, Skiptoe! We will walk down to de cotehouse yard, whar de sheriff kin hear us holler an' come an' rescue us ef you gits violent. Den we will set down under a tree an' talk dis bizness out."

III

THEY escorted Skiptoe to a bench in the shade of a tree in the courthouse lawn, choosing a spot where they could look through an open window and behold the sheriff sitting at his desk. Then they felt more comfortable. Skeeter Butts remembered that some one had given him a cigar; and as he never smoked tobacco in that form—and it was a cheap smoke, anyhow, he offered it to Skiptoe with a most generous gesture.

When they had all rested for awhile, and had tried to formulate their impressions and get ready for new revelations, Vinegar Atts said:

"Now, Skiptoe, git started, an' don't skip nothin'. Whut about dis scheme of yourn to buy a suit of clothes fer a two-year-old corp'?"

"He wusn't two year old," Skiptoe said. "He warn't no little chile. He wus a old gray-head man. I reckon he wus about as old as de country. I never heard of nobody dat come here befo' he wus here."

"Go on!" Vinegar urged.

"I been thinkin' about dis when we wus comin' over here," Skiptoe continued. "When you go in a sto' an' buy a suit, dey let you try it on, don't dey?"

"Suttinly," Skeeter said. "Dat's de only way you kin tell whether it fits or not; but how in de name of mud kin you try a new suit on a man who's been dead two year?"

"Dat cain't be did," Skiptoe said thoughtfully; "but ef I could find a nigger whut looked a good deal like de corp', we could try de clothes on him, couldn't we?"

"Dat sounds reasomble to me," Skeeter agreed.

"Now I been lookin' at Figger Bush ever since I been here," Skiptoe said, turning his squinty, sunburned eyes in calculating measurement upon that startled colored man. "He's about of a size an' color, an' he reminds my mind of de figger an' de face of dat two-year-old dead man. Ef Figger Bush—"

"Who? Me?" Figger howled. "Try a dead man's suit of clothes on me to see ef dey fit? I resigns! I declines de honor! Positively not!"

"I reckon it would make a feller feel mighty blame foolish," Skeeter Butts opined. "I admits it would make me feel kind of squeamish; but I think Figger oughter be willin' to do dat much kindness fer de dead. You see he ain't been dead recent—he's a kind of late deceased. Two years is a long time."

"Not ef de man had been dead a millyum years!" Figger exclaimed,

and his eyes nearly popped out of his head at the thought. "I wouldn't try Adam's fig leaf on me, an' Adam an' Eve is been dead a long time. When a man is dead, he's dead, an' dat's de end of him, an' I'm finished up wid him, too. I don't want to hab nothin' at all to do wid him!"

"It would shore tickle me to see you in a trousseau of borrowed coffin duds," Pap Curtain snarled. "When I think of dat special suit what we's considerin', I bet I'd git a big laugh out of dem fun'ral gyarmints, even ef I's a gravedigger by occupation an' my labor's a mournful potterin' amongst de tombstones."

"So you think Figger looks like dis here corp'?" Vinegar remarked thoughtfully, surveying his friend as if to revive some faint recollection of some other man who might have resembled him.

"Well, now, of co'se, whut I mean is dis," Skiptoe said, scratching his woolly head. "Mebbe I oughter say Figger looks a good deal like dat dead man looked. He's got de same kind of bothered, foolish expression on his face dat de dead man up in Shongaloon had befo' he done died, an' attar he done died, too."

"Listen here!" Figger howled, feeling that if he did not hurry to offer some other suggestion they might compel him to try on the suit. "Why don't Skiptoe try it on himself? He's buyin' it, an' he's payin' fer it; an' ef it pleases him, dat's all we have got to know. When de lodge sent him down as a cormittee of one, dey nachelly expected him to try on dat suit!"

"I wants to git whut you might call a outside view," Skiptoe explained. "I ain't gwine to buy it ontill I kin git somebody to try it on, so I kin see how it looks."

"Put it on an' look at yo'self in de lookin'-glass, you fool!" Figger exclaimed.

"Hol' on, niggers!" Vinegar 'Atts said suddenly. "We done got away

from de reason why we come over to dis bench. Whut I want to know is dis—why do Skiptoe crave to buy a coffin suit fer a man who has been dead an' buried fer two years? An' how is you gwine to put dem clothes on de feller, ef you buy 'em? Skiptoe, you has de flo', an' ef anybody interrupts you while you talks I'll bat him over de bean!"

"Dar ain't no myst'ry about it," Skiptoe said, clawing at his woolly head to stimulate his thoughts. "We got a little burial club up in Shongaloon, whar we pay two bits per each week as dues. We guarantee dat eve'y man whut belongs to our club, when he dies, will hab a nice coffin, a nice suit of clothes, a nice hearse, an' two kerrages; an' ef we hab enough financial money to pay fer it, we always furnish a brass band. Dat's a good abbertize, an' always fatches in a lot of new members. Now we oughter keep a contrack wid a member, don't you think?"

"Shore!" Pap Curtain said. "Always be honest, an' you'll always be happy an' pore, an' you'll go-to heavum when you die!"

"Well, suh, we had a ol' nigger in our club named Bash Turpin," Skiptoe continued. "Bash paid his two bits reg'lar, an' I suspicion dat he went hongry pretty frequent in awder to pay it. He wus a awful ol' man, an' he couldn't wuck much, an' dar ain't many folks in dat country whut donate a few loose change to anybody; but Bash said he never had had no nice clothes, an' he always wanted to wear a nice suit, an' he figgered it out dat de only way he could git dressed up real sporty wus to pay his burial dues reg'lar an' be furnished wid a nice suit when he died."

"Hear dat now!" Pap Curtain howled. "Did de good Lawd ever hear a notion like dat befo'?"

"Now, two year ago we had a epi-zootic of de Spanish influence up in Shongaloon, an' a right smart passel

of our members died of dat flu," Skiptoe resumed. "Of co'se, wid all our money gwine out fer fun'rals an' not enough comin' in, our cash got low, an' our club become onfinancial. We mighty nigh went bust; an' jes' when we had de leastest money in de treasury, Bash Turpin up an' died on us."

"Shore! Too bad!" Vinegar Atts commented. "Dat's nigger luck. Whenever it rains soup, a nigger's plate is turned upside down, an' when gold dollars draps from de sky, a nigger is in jail. Dat's de way it always go."

"It wus powerful hard on our feelin's as members of de club," Skiptoe said. "We had to go to see our lodge brudder eve'y day, an' he laid dar all pushed down in de bed. He wusn't black any mo', but wus jes' de color of ashes on de eend of a cheap cabbage leaf garbage cigar, like dis'n Skeeter gimme; an' we couldn't git him to talk about nothin' or to take interest in nothin' but dat nice suit of coffin clothes he wus gwine to be able to wear when he died."

"My Gawd, dat wus hard!" Figger Bush wailed.

"Of co'se, we could not tell dat pore sick man dat our club had done gone bust an' we couldn't buy him no suit," Skiptoe went on. "Naw, suh—we jes' stood dar at dat coon's dyin' bed an' lied to him scandalous; an' he died happy, knowin' fer shore, he thought, dat he'd be well dressed an' sporty at de eend."

"Lawd! Lawd!" Vinegar Atts sighed.

All the details of poverty, and all the tragedy and heartbreak incidental thereto, are known to the sable sons of Africa, the saddest race on earth. As Skiptoe's narrative proceeded, the four men listening could visualize it all—the dilapidated cabin, the squalid surroundings, the eager, childlike longing of a man who had struggled through a lifetime of want. Every man sighed

in pity and waited to hear the conclusion of the tale.

"An' so, of co'se, we had bad luck clean through. When Bash died, we buried him in a pine box furnished by de parish. We laid him away in his old farm clothes, an' we hauled him out to de graveyard wid a mule team hitched to a common old muddy plantation wagon."

Suddenly Skiptoe sprang to his feet, belled his hands around his mouth, and called:

"Hey! Mike Mule! Come over dis way a minute!"

IV

A TRAMPISH-LOOKING negro paused in his idle meandering down the street, and, without quickening his pace in the slightest, turned and came toward Skiptoe. It made no difference to Mike in which direction he was traveling, because he had nowhere to go. When he came to the place where the men were sitting, and there was no room for him on the bench, he dropped down comfortably upon the ground and waited for something else to happen.

"I's thinkin' about buyin' a suit of clothes, Mike," Skiptoe said. "It's a kind of sport suit, an' I want to see how it would look on somebody besides myse'f. Would you be willin' to go down to de sto' an' try on dem clothes fer me?"

"Suttinly!" agreed Mike, grinning cheerfully. "I would like to see myse'f jes' one time in a new suit of sto'-bought clothes. Le's go down dar right away!"

They entered the store. Skiptoe priced the suit, and then pulled a large roll of money out of his pocket and counted it to see if he had enough to pay what was asked. He made quite a display of his money, and the eyes of the little shopkeeper grew keen and covetous.

"Mike Mule wants to try on dis suit befo' I pays fer it," Skiptoe said.

"Jes' dis way, Mike," the clerk commanded.

In a few minutes Mike reappeared, dressed in everything from the big two-gallon slouch hat down. He was such a sight that a blind horse could have seen him, and, having seen him, would surely have run away in terror; but Mike thought it was all very wonderful.

"It fits jes' like de paper on de wall!" the shopkeeper gurgled.

"It's a sporty combination, all right," Vinegar Atts agreed. "It causes mo' of a sensation on my insides dan it did when I fust seen it. De effect seems to increase instead of diminish in power. It makes me sick. As fer Mike, he looks almost like a human critter!"

"It pleases me exactly," Skiptoe remarked, and began at once to count out his money and lay it upon the counter. "When Mike takes 'em off, wrop 'em up fer me. I'm gwine to Shongaloon wid 'em."

Mike looked puzzled at all this. The storekeeper also received the impression that there was something queer about it, and he examined the money cautiously. As for the Big Four, they were completely confused, confounded, and befuddled. Only Skiptoe seemed to be sure of himself and to know exactly what he was about.

When they stepped out of the store with the garments securely wrapped and carefully carried under the purchaser's arm, Skiptoe turned to Mike and said:

"Does you know whar you kin buy a good big drink?"

"Suttinly!" said Mike, grinning. "I always knows whar I kin git it."

Skiptoe handed him one dollar.

"Go git it fer yo'se'f," he said.

"I wish I could take dat suit wid me!" Mike sighed, but he went away, wearing a smile that would not come off.

"Whar is we at, an' whar does we go from here?" Vinegar Atts wailed,

when Mike had departed. His despairing tone indicated that he thought he had been too far with Skiptoe, and did not know the way back home. "Whut you gwine to do wid dat suit?"

"Take it wid me to de Shongaloon Burial Lodge," Skiptoe told him. "It will make a hit wid de members!"

"Does you aim to dig up ol' Bash an' put dem clothes on him?" Pap Curtain snarled.

"Naw, suh—we ain't decided exactly whut we aims to do wid dese duds. Pussonly I's in favor of takin' 'em out to de burial ground an' layin' 'em on de grave whar Bash is buried at; or we might hang 'em on de limbs of de tree over his grave. Of co'se, I know Bash don't keer nothin' about clothes now. Ef he had a pair of pants, I reckon he wouldn't hab nothin' to put 'em on. I never heard tell of a angel wearin' pants. I guess he's been fitted out wid de gyarments of salvation by dis time; but I favors jes' takin' 'em out to de graveyard an' leavin' 'em dar. Mebbe he'll know dat dey is dar, an' dat we done our best to keep our contrack wid a brudder member of de club."

"My good Lawd!" Vinegar Atts howled. "Whut do Gawdlemighty think about a thing like dat?"

"It is mighty nigh train time, bruders," Skiptoe said, glancing up at the sun. "I reckon I better be waitin' at de deppo when she comes in. Thankee fer he'pin' me. Good-by!"

V

Two weeks passed, and every day the Big Four met and discussed their experience with old Skiptoe of Shongaloon. They could not get the incident off their minds.

"Dat wus de biggest nut dat ever grewed on any tree!" Skeeter Butts announced in tones of deep conviction. "I thought I had saw eve'y kind of fool in de worl', but I ain't never gwine to say dat dar ain't no new kinds, because I done saw Skiptoe!"

"His heart wus in de right place, even ef his head wus settin' on wrong end to," Vinegar declared. "He wus tryin' to be a honest bizness man an' do right by de club members, bofe livin' an' dead. Jes' as soon as de club got financial enough to affode Bash his suit, dey kep' deir promise to him an' bought him one."

"I wonder how dey arranged wid dem clothes!" Pap Curtain commented. "Did dey take 'em out of de box an' spread 'em aroun' over his grave? Or did dey jes' go dar an' leave de bundle, an' skiddoo? Or did dey make a kind of dummy like a skeercrow, an' dress dem clothes aroun' a stick stuck in de ground? Or did dey hang 'em on de limbs of de tree, like a week's warsh put out to dry? Whut come to pass?"

"Gawd knows," Figger Bush sighed; "but I figger dat ef any nigger whut didn't know about dem arrangements went out in dat cemingtery an' saw a grave wid a full suit of clothes laid on it, or even a hat an' a necktie, jes' like boys lays deir clothes on de banks of de bayou an' dives in de water—I bet dat nigger got so skeart, he's a runnin' yit!"

"Yep," Skeeter agreed. "It makes me feel squeamish now to think about a feller takin' off his clothes an' divin' into a grave. When you go down in dat place, you got to take a private plunge."

At this point the door opened, and Little Bit, the diminutive negro factotum of the Henscratch, came in from the post office and placed a letter on the table in front of the Rev. Vinegar Atts. While the others were talking, Vinegar hastily glanced over the communication.

"Dis here letter," he said, "tells us a whole lot dat we want to know, bruders. It is wrote by a cullud lady school-teacher of Shongaloon. She is de gran'chile of ol' Bash Turpin."

"Read it!" Skeeter howled. "I's aching to know about dat!"

Vinegar did not read the letter, but spread it out upon the table, and the four men bent above the document with eager eyes:

REVUN ATTS:

I take my pen in hand to write and thank you and the other Big Four for helping Skiptoe make the final funeral arrangements for my beloved and deceased grandparent, Bash Turpin.

Thanks to your help, the burial club bought for him a beautiful suit, and we put it in a beautiful gray box just like a beautiful casket, with gray hearse and horses. Beautiful gray flowers were provided; and from a beautiful undertaker's parlor the suit was taken to the beautiful new repaired church. We had a beautiful service, and our pastor, the Rev. Joist Hite, preached a beautiful heart-feeling sermon. From there we took it to a beautiful cemetery and laid the gray suit box to rest on the grave where the old man is laid away. We had already planted beautiful flowers, and when we laid the beautiful flowers we had brought around the box, it made a beautiful picture.

Yours,

GUSH TURPIN.

"Whut a beautiful letter!" Skeeter Butts exclaimed in an awed voice.

Just then the door opened, and an apparition entered which so completely startled the Big Four that they came very near going away from there by making a hasty exit through the window.

A man stood before them clothed in a most extraordinary outfit. The pattern of his coat and trousers was a black and white check so hot that one could fry a catfish on it. He had a red rose in his lapel—a touch of fire to start a conflagration. He wore a fancy waistcoat of dark purple, and every visible inch of it was covered with long, thin horses and dogs engaged in a wild, leggy race to somewhere. It was a debatable question whether the dogs were chasing the horses or the horses were trying to trample the dogs.

Under the waistcoat was a plaid shirt with a smash and clash of color which made one think that such a com-

bination could be achieved only when lightning struck the rainbow and made gumbo soup out of the spectrum. Above the sartorial display was a two-gallon slouch hat with a band of Roman stripe as wide as a man's hand.

The man inside these garments was Mike Mule!

The startled quartet of Tickfall received him standing.

"Fer de Lawd's sake, Mike!" Vinegar howled. "How come you are wearin' Bash's burial suit?"

"I followed dese clothes to Shongaloon," Mike grinned. "As soon as I got to dat town, I paid my two bits an' j'ined up wid de Shongaloon Burial Lodge. We lef' dese clothes on Bash's grave fer one night only; then I got de club to decide unanimous dat I should be allowed to vote Bash's proxy an' to wear his coffin suit."

"Oh, Lawd hab mussy!" Vinegar Atts whooped. "Dis here beats any story of death an' de grave I ever heard tell of!"

"Dis graveyard story is gwine hab a happy endin' fer me," Mike said with deep satisfaction. "I made such a hit wid Sister Gush Turpin wid my new suit dat she's gittin' ready to marry me. She's a school-teacher, an' she kin suppute me easy!"

"Did de club debate much about allowin' you to wear Bash's suit?" Figger inquired.

"Naw, suh!" Mike told him. "Us all agreed dat ef Bash went to heaven, he didn't take his body up dar wid him. Wherever de ol' man is at, he's jes' a sperit now; an' so he don't need no clothes, because a disembodied sperit ain't got nothin' to button his britches to!"

MY DOG

My best velvet rugs are spotted and chewed;
Not a nook in this house where pup doesn't intrude;
My imported lace curtains are ragged and torn,
The new tapestry chair is all scratched and worn—
That's what you get for loving a dog!

My dresses and coats are bespattered with mud;
From dressing his foot, I'm all covered with blood;
He digs up my garden, plays havoc with my flowers,
And takes up my time for hours upon hours—
That's what you get for loving a dog!

Years go by, and my puppy grows sober and old;
He mustn't be left out too long in the cold;
So he keeps me at work, when he raps on the pane
To come in, to go out, then to come in again—
That's what you get for loving a dog!

An oncoming truck, grinding brakes, crunching bones;
Not a whimper or whine, not the faintest of moans—
Just a dog lying dead! Some may think it a joke,
But that's my old dog, and my heart's almost broke—
That's what you get for loving a dog!

Bertha Lyon McKinney



The High Pressure Goat

*Telling How William Angora, Once a Mascot in the Navy, Came to Play,
With His Human Partner, an Important Rôle in the Local
Politics of Brooksmoot*

By Richard Howells Watkins



BETWEEN two crests of the concrete highway that undulated over the rugged New England coast country there ran a hollow. In the hollow, on the edge of the road, there stood a man and a goat.

The man, tall and stringy, with eyes a mild tint of blue, was lighting a brier pipe, as if stoking up a bit before attempting the height before him. The goat stood with head erect, regarding the hill ahead with the contempt of one who has surmounted many hills. He was harnessed to a gaudy red and white express wagon capable of accommodating, at a pinch, two small children.

While the man was still cupping his

hands around the match at the bowl of his pipe, the goat suddenly turned his head and fixed unblinking, red-rimmed eyes upon him. Jake Partland threw away his match, took a quick experimental puff at his pipe, and moved unwillingly to the wagon.

"All right, goat! I'm coming," he grumbled, and took up an extra trace that was attached to the wagon shaft. "No big hurry, is there?"

The goat heaved ahead, the man took his share of the burden, and the little vehicle rolled up the hill.

Almost at the crest, as Jake Partland was beginning to pant, they passed a garage and filling station. There was a booth alongside that proclaimed itself a filling station for man: Jake let his eyes drift toward this lat-

ter, and he sniffed the smell of sizzling frankfurters thoughtfully; but the goat, with head turned forward, was pulling strongly, and the man kept step. They passed the pleasant smell.

"Hey! Wait a minute!" some one hailed.

Jake Partland looked back. A big man, prosperously arrayed, was standing in the doorway of the garage and making hospitable motions toward the refreshment stand. He came toward Jake, and Jake and the goat stopped and gazed toward him. Jake noticed that, despite the big man's good clothes, his hands, by their blackness and their broken finger nails, told his trade.

"Have a dog—on me," said the garage proprietor cordially. "Will the goat have one, too?"

Jake looked at this hospitable person hopefully, even wistfully, but not without a certain wariness. He had found goat lovers among the adult population scarce.

There was nothing that hinted of treachery about the garage man. He was middle-aged, with a confident manner and an aggressive jaw. Smiling broadly, he continued to make that tormenting gesture toward the refreshment booth.

"Well, guess I'd like to," said Jake with embarrassed gratitude. "Sort of stirs up an appetite, tramping the concrete, Mr.—"

The garage man, leading the way to the stand, pointed a strong, blunt finger to the sign over the establishment.

"Frank Carpenter, of Brooksmet—that's me, and has been since I was born right on this road," he said. He dropped a hot frankfurter into a roll and pressed it on Jake. "How about this goat, now? Will he have one?"

"I—I guess he would, but he better not," Jake decided slowly. "Maybe I better give him some fodder that he eats when we're in cities. I got some in the wagon. Usually he ain't particular, but he don't like the grass around filling stations. That's an un-

usual goat, that is!"

"Any goat's unusual on this road," said Mr. Carpenter, staring at the animal with deep interest. "That's why I called out to you."

Jake dealt out a generous portion of his goat's food. The animal ate with the same brisk concentration with which he had scaled the hill.

Jake, his jaws demolishing the frankfurter, joined Frank Carpenter in his examination of the goat. In silence they viewed the sinuous curve of his horns, the luxuriance of his snowy white ringlets of hair, and the uncompromising severity of his countenance.

"That's an unusual goat, that is," Jake repeated proudly. "I never saw such a goat. All business, he is."

"Photographer?" inquired the garage man, nodding toward the big camera and tripod that were stowed in the express wagon.

"That's us," said Jake. He sat down on a box and wiggled his weary feet with a sigh of relief. "Itinerant scenic photographers—that's what we are. He and the express wagon's the scenery. He's good at it, too, though I haven't had him long. He was a mascot on a battleship, but he didn't like it, and made it plain; so I got him."

Carpenter was not listening to all this. He was merely staring at the goat.

"You know, he's sort of a good omen to me," he remarked thoughtfully. "I've seen lots of things on this road, but it's years since I saw a goat. Yes, sir, he's a good omen."

"He's a good goat," Jake declared. "He's considerably more of a salesman than I am, William Angora is. He's advertising manager of this outfit, too. All I have to do is to take the picture. Say, can you tell me if Brooksmet's likely to be a place where I could do some business—lots of kids with mothers that might loosen up to have their kids snapped driving a goat like that?"

Mr. Carpenter did not reply at once. He seemed to be thinking. Jake took advantage of the pause to add regretfully:

"Down in New York the kids are so sophis—sophis—so knowing that they look down on a goat. They want to be taken driving a car, or running an airplane. One kid followed us four blocks yelling: 'Get a car! Get a car!' As if I wouldn't get a car for us if I could afford one! Anyhow, that's why we come up New England way, looking for better business. How do you think we'd go in Brooksmet for a few days?"

"I don't know," the garage man temporized. "There's an official in this town—sort of the boss—that's sensitive about goats."

"Not about this goat he wouldn't be," Jake asserted confidently. "I got this goat all fixed up with violet perfume. I lay in a stock every time I get near a five and ten."

"I don't mean that way," said Carpenter. "Here, have another dog." Without too great an effort, he induced the photographer to repeat. "I'll tell you about this lad in town. That's why your goat's a good omen to me. You see, I'm running for office in town—want to get on the board of selectmen. That's why I'm dressed up this way."

"And you look great, too," Jake interpolated, his voice muffled but hearty.

"Well, the fellow that don't like goats is the fellow I'm up against. He's a politician, all right, and hard to beat, though I'm going to do it. His name's Bock, and the only time he ever lost out for selectman—last time but one—was because a fellow that used to keep a saloon, and hadn't any use for some old bock beer signs, hung 'em up around town promiscuous, just before the voting. You know those signs that used to come out in the spring, with a goat's head on 'em, and 'bock beer' in big letters?"

Jake nodded emphatically.

"I wasn't in politics then, but I done my share of the laughing. Well, sir, some of the drys took the signs seriously, thinking Bock was trying to grab the wet vote, and they got mad; and the wets got an awful thirst, remembering about times back, and a good many of 'em thought Bock was making a mighty poor joke. Then this same fellow—he hadn't much use for Sam Bock—led a goat with more signs on around town till Bock had him pinched for disorderly conduct; but anyhow Bock lost. They laughed him out of office; and seeing that goat of yours come up the hill sort of gave me a hunch that Bock was due for another beating this time."

"And we hope he is—the both of us do," Jake Partland asserted with grateful fervor.

"Since then Bock's been sort of sensitive about goats, seems like. I know I could get him sore and set people to laughing by hiring you to parade around town with that goat, even without a sign."

Jake Partland stood up and fidgeted uneasily on his dusty feet before he spoke.

"I don't know 's I like that job," he said apologetically. "I need money, all right, I'm not afraid to admit that; but the trouble with me is I don't like trouble. 'Tisn't that I'm scared of being licked—I been licked plenty of times—but I never get anything out of it. I can't get mad enough at the other fellow to win; and if you don't win, there's no sense in fighting."

"Well, that's so, too, and I guess I don't want to play any dirty trick like that on Bock, anyhow," Frank Carpenter decided. "I want to win this election without anybody being able to say that it was a goat that did it for me. Have some pop before you go?"

Jake Partland glanced down at the goat. William Angora's repast was almost over. Already he was beginning to cast lowering, disdainful glances at the hill; but the garage own-

er had already flicked the cap off the bottle. Jake drank hastily, and put the empty bottle back on the counter just as the goat looked at him.

"Well, I got to be going," he said with a sigh. "That goat don't give me much leeway. He's always on the prance. You don't know how much I'm obliged to you. Road's sort of lonely with all these cars whisking by, and I always got a crevice I can tuck a frankfurter or two down in."

"We got to have cars—wouldn't be any business if we didn't," Mr. Carpenter declared.

Jake nodded.

"I wish I had one myself. A little delivery car—a secondhand one, of course—would be handy on this trip. Maybe then I could keep up with William Angora."

The goat started forward abruptly, almost as if he were about to butt the hill out of his path.

"There he goes!" exclaimed the garage man. "Whee! He must smell a cash customer. You better catch him!"

"He'll have me ridin' in a limousine one o' these days—or a hearse," said Jake, over his shoulder. "I'm wishing you luck on that election!"

He waved a hand and panted after the goat. Overtaking it, he seized hold of the third trace, and together they pulled the little red express wagon up to the summit. Here a wonderful autumn landscape was spread out around them. The year was dying in a blaze of defiant splendor—yellow, brown, and crimson.

The main road paused briefly on this fair elevation and then dived with abrupt severity into another beautiful valley, whence it climbed again to a still greater height.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Jake Partland. He had concerned himself more with altitudes than with colors. "That 'll be a sticker, that hill will!"

The goat had no comment to make on either the view or the remark; but

he turned decisively from the highway toward another road, at right angles. This latter descended in easy, curving inclines toward the Sound, and a signpost indicated that it was the turn-off for Brooksmoot.

"Here!" Jake corrected, seizing hold of the goat's horns. "That's not the way we go. There might be trouble for us down in that town!"

The goat did not respond to Jake's steering. He uttered a cry tremulous with indignation and with a certain weakness of tone that was belied by the subsequent facts. These facts were a series of muscular operations of considerable severity. It became instantly apparent to Jake why William Angora's resignation as the mascot of a battleship had been accepted by the naval authorities. It became apparent, too, that where a shipload of husky young sailors had failed, Jake Partland could not succeed. Moreover, the express wagon was in danger of dissolution.

"All right! Be mulish if you want to," said Jake sulkily.

He picked up his pipe and examined it solicitously. Then he limped after the goat down the gentle slope toward Brooksmoot. In truth, that road would have been more tempting to him, too, than the other, had he not known that possible trouble lurked at the bottom of it.

II

JAKE's anger at the obstinacy of the perfumed goat was considerably cooled during the descent toward Brooksmoot. He could not help respecting the certitude of the goat's gait and the unchanging fixity of expression on his bearded and venerable countenance. Even more than usual the goat seemed to know where he was going.

"Maybe he's following a hunch," Jake murmured.

He was quite convinced, by this time, that William Angora was with him heart and soul in the photographic business. He could not tell whether

this was due, as he had thought at first, to a broad streak of egoism in the goat, which was gratified by constant posing for his photograph, or to some less obvious quality, such as inborn determination or a desire to get on in the world; but never had the photographer had to complain of any laxity or failing of interest in his professional partner. This, though it was the most forcible, was not the first time, or the tenth, that William Angora had dictated a decision.

Jake's apprehension was allayed by a rising curiosity. He had followed hunches all his life—with little success, to be sure; but this time he was following a goat's hunch. It seemed reasonable that an unusual goat should have unusual hunches.

The houses, white and brown, that straggled along the road drew closer together as they came nearer to the Sound. Brooksmet took on the appearance of a goodly town, with lawns, raked free of leaves, and with well-pruned elms, sycamores, and oaks arching overhead. Down the curving way Jake caught glimpses of two church spires, a square white town hall, and a business block.

"You'd think in a fine old town like this there'd be quite a few kids that wouldn't look down on a goat," Jake murmured.

He found himself in hearty accord with William Angora when the goat turned purposefully from the road, which was fast becoming Main Street, into a side street which was evidently in the old residential section. The trees here were enormous, and the houses, if not so Colonial as the newer ones, were at least more spacious.

"Look at that, now!" Jake commented admiringly. "That goat knows there may not be many kids along here, but what are will take to him fine!"

He took up the reins, which had been fastened to the seat, and began to drive the animal.

They had gone only a little way

when they came on a small boy who was making a bonfire of leaves. Beside him the goat halted decisively.

"Whoa!" said Jake commandingly, to the motionless goat. Then he looked at the small boy. "Hello, boy! You want to drive this goat?"

"No money," replied the boy sadly.

He walked around the goat distantly, but gradually approaching. His expression, at first curious, rapidly became covetous.

William Angora pawed the ground vigorously, tossed a restive head, and gave other obvious indications of his intense desire to be driven by this particular youth.

"First ride's always free," Jake said amiably, as he took his camera, tripod, and bundle out of the wagon. "Advertising offer, to get us introduced to the neighborhood. Hop aboard, son! You can drive him as far as the next crossroad."

The boy scrambled into the wagon hastily, as if to outspeed any change of mind on the part of the photographer. He reached out a quick hand for the reins, and recovered his balance with a start as William Angora got into motion. Jake Partland leaned his chin on his tripod to watch.

This was just the right sort of boy for an exhibition ride. He drove vocally, even histrionically. At one moment he was urging his fiery ruminant to even greater speed; at the next he was straining every muscle to curb its headlong career. Always, no matter what vicissitude he was undergoing, he kept the neighborhood informed.

The effect was magical. Three boys shot around the corner on bicycles. Another popped out of a cellar. Several little girls emerged from a back yard. After that Jake lost count, but a rising tide of youth surged around him, his camera, and William Angora—particularly William Angora.

"Well!" said Jake, with a broad and broadening smile.

Although he had yet to take in any

money, a peculiar lightness of heart prevailed in him. This was a real reception, and it grew better by the minute. Wise children who had dallied in their houses for a few minutes were now appearing, many of them with coin in hand. Others hurried homeward to get their money.

Jake cut but a poor figure among men, and he knew it, but now he really amounted to something. He was the owner of an animal that all about him coveted; he was the target of clamorous questions; he was the arbiter of disputes; he was the dispenser of remarkable photographs. In short, he was the most prominent person present, save only the boy or girl who, at the moment, was driving the goat or being photographed in the wagon.

But no matter how busy he was, Jake kept an admiring eye on the goat. William Angora mixed no pleasure with his work. He played the rôle as he interpreted it—a goat with a strain of thoroughbred racer in him at one moment, and the next, before the camera's eye, a statuesque and dignified goat with curving, formidable horns.

He had abandoned his theatricals of the first ride in favor of a rapid trot, for customers were clamoring for their turns, and there was no time for airs and graces. Moreover, he was shortening the ride in a way that brought an occasional reproach to Jake Partland's eye. In that partnership it was obvious that William Angora knew more than Jake about the workings of the law of supply and demand.

Out of the main street, toward the midst of this milling youthful crowd, came a dun-colored car, growling in its vitals. Its driver, failing to split the throng by a vigorous use of the button on his steering wheel, pulled over to the side of the road and stopped the car with a vicious rasp of his emergency brake. He emerged, scowling, to confront the absorbed photographer.

"You get that public nuisance out

of here!" he demanded.

Jake Partland, coming out of his busy trance abruptly, turned to the newcomer. The motorist's red face needed no scowl to make it menacing, and he was a big man, too.

"That's no public nuisance, brother," Jake said with a placating smile. "That's an Angora goat, and perfumed at that. Here, you kids!" He addressed his juvenile customers in a voice of authority. "You come in out of the street, and let this gentleman get by!"

"The gentleman isn't going to go by," said the man from the car. "Have you got a license? Do you know who you're talking to? Where'd you come from with that over-size skunk—blocking up the roads and letting these kids raise Cain?"

This questionnaire was too long and too involved for Jake Partland to answer at once. He stared at the other man with a growing anticipation of trouble. He was remembering the garage man's warning.

"You better not play dumb with me, young fellow!"

"You—you aren't Bock, are you?" Jake mumbled, appalled.

"Yes, I'm Selectman Bock," snapped the other. He brandished a hard, efficient-looking fist. "I know why you're here, but they can't put that over on me twice—not on me! Pretending to take tintypes of kids! I'll fix you, you sneaking goat nurse, you! I'll fix you right now!"

Resignedly Jake Partland drew away from his camera and his goat, clenching his own lean fists. He wished that he had had three frankfurters. He knew what was coming, and he knew that he would be beaten.

Selectman Bock, however, made no effort to follow him. Almost as he had voiced his threat, he turned around and ran toward his car. He got in, amid the jeers of little children's voices, turned it around, and shot away.

"He's going to have me pinched!" Jake muttered. "He knows I have no license!"

Hastily he dismounted his camera. Disregarding the pleas of his customers, he stowed it and his other effects in the express wagon, seized William Angora by the bridle, and headed for the main street.

"You and your hunch!" he muttered resentfully to the goat. "First thing you know you'll be confiscated and I'll be in jail!"

III

To Jake Partland, on the crumbling edge of respectability, jail was an ever present menace, a gulf all the more terrible because he had never yet fallen into it; but always it yawned before him.

Though he had started at the head of a procession, the children had been impressed by the inevitability of his packing up, and the crowd behind him thinned rapidly. The goat episode was over; they scattered to seek other excitement.

At the corner Jake headed the goat uphill, toward the highway that would take him beyond reach of Selectman Bock's authority; but William Angora stopped suddenly, as if his hoofs had become embedded in the road. Then, with his head lowered deliberately, he turned downhill, toward the business block and the town hall, which probably had a cell or two beneath it.

"No, sir!" said Jake decisively. "You don't get me any farther into this town. We've got to be moving along fast. Come on now!"

He tugged hard at the trace, but William Angora had anchored himself as if he were a cast-iron goat on a front lawn.

"What's the idea?" Jake demanded hotly. "You think that fellow didn't mean what he said? He's gone for a cop. We've got to go, I tell you!"

There ensued on that street corner a trial of strength and endurance that

quite surpassed the argument at the top of the hill; but this time it was Jake who endeavored to lead, not the goat. Panic had lent strength to the man, but William Angora had always had strength. When Jake had quite used himself up, the goat tranquilly turned downhill.

In that bitter moment it occurred to Jake to let the goat go its way alone; but that idea was merely a fleeting one. Being too tired to struggle further, he began to think instead.

He began to believe that perhaps the goat was right in heading downhill. Selectman Bock could pick up a policeman and easily overtake them in his car on that long grade up to the main highway. On the other hand, if Jake hurried down to the town hall and got a license, it was possible that the judge or the police might be merciful. It certainly seemed as if the goat was still following that hunch of his.

"All right—we'll try it," Jake panted.

Wavering on his feet from fatigue, he followed William Angora's dignified progress down Main Street. The goat was too well poised and the man too much exhausted to notice the rising interest that their passage aroused among the citizens of Brooksmoot.

On a side street near the white severity of the town hall Jake tethered the goat to a lamp-post. Not without quakes which he strove to confine to his interior did he approach the building.

At the sight of the small basement entrance, guarded by ominous green-globed lamps, Jake broke into a run and bolted up the front steps into the larger entrance. A youth, with a cigarette depending from his mouth, followed him in hastily; but Jake did not look back. Inside, he headed for the first grilled window in the first office he saw.

"I want a license!" he gasped.

The clerk within—a young man with a poise to equal that of William An-

gora—bent upon Jake the cold, official eye which public servants reserve for their public masters.

"What's your trouble, brother—automobile or marriage?" he inquired.

Several gentlemen who loitered about, waiting with unexampled patience and for unknown reasons, snickered. The young man of the cigarette, who stood behind Jake, smiled crookedly.

"Goat."

The snickers were intensified. Jake became aware that he was an object of public interest.

"Goat!" repeated the clerk, and searched Jake Partland's face for humor. He saw none—nothing but agitation. "Sorry, but we don't carry goat licenses," he said smoothly. "Demand's too small. How about a driver's license? You're driving the goat, aren't you?"

"Sometimes," Jake answered. He was miserably aware that to this man the crisis in his life was a thing to jest over. "I've got to get a license. I've been warned. I just got to town and took a few pictures of kids in my express wagon, and—"

"Room 12," broke in the man behind the grille. "Peddler's license—you're selling pictures—get 'em to add 'and goat' to your name. Room 12."

Ten minutes later, dubiously inspecting a small yellow document, Jake Partland stood in the doorway of the town hall. He peered into the street for signs of Selectman Bock, but saw none.

One of the loungers, the lanky youth with the cigarette in his mouth, whom Jake saw now for the first time, sauntered over to him.

"Say, if you want to do some photographing business with that goat, try Elm Street—two blocks up and turn right," he advised, out of the corner of his mouth not occupied by the cigarette. "There's a big yellow house on the first corner, with a houseful of kids in it that would love to be taken driv-

ing a goat. Go right up and knock at the door. That's a straight tip, fellow!"

"Thanks!" said Jake gratefully.

He had already decided not to return to his previous place. The coming of Mr. Bock had quite spoiled that location. Even with a license in his hand, he did not care to encounter so turbulent a person as the selectman. There was no profit in it, and this license had eaten up Jake's previous earnings in Brooksmoot. He must recoup. Not even two hot dogs and a bottle of pop will keep a man's stomach properly occupied for long.

William Angora, the center of a small crowd, was wagging his beard in cosmic contemplation, utterly unconcerned by the attentions of his public. Jake apologetically pushed his way through to the goat, untied him, and got under way.

The goat was docile now, but his master was alert for signs of revolt. The little red wagon rolled up two blocks without a pause, and then turned right into Elm Street without any signs of lack of accord from William Angora. Though few people were following, a group of gentlemen from the town hall still strolled some little distance behind the goat. The inconspicuous youth who had given Jake the advice about the big yellow house was among them. These spectators, however, dropped farther behind as the wagon rattled into Elm Street. Moreover, they dissociated themselves from the goat by crossing the street.

"Whoa!" said Jake imperatively, in front of the house to which he had been directed. To his gratification, the goat halted obediently. Jake waited hopefully for the equipage to attract youthful eyes behind the starched curtains in the big yellow residence; but no children emerged from its doors.

"Whoa!" he said, louder and louder, until William Angora became somewhat restive.

Still the dignity of Elm Street was

undisturbed by juvenile whoops. Jake took out his camera, set it on the tripod, and waited.

"Guess I better go up and knock on the door, like that fellow told me," Jake said to the goat at last. "They don't seem to know that we're here."

Not without some trepidation, he walked up the pebble path and knocked cautiously. Then he knocked a little louder.

Footsteps thudded within, and the door was opened. Jake found himself staring at the surprised countenance of his friend of the garage, Frank Carpenter.

"H-hello!" Jake stammered uncertainly. "A fellow around at the town hall told me there were lots o' children here. I didn't know it was your place."

"That's funny!" said the garage man. "My kids are grown up beyond goats. A fellow around the town hall, eh?" He removed a crumb from the corner of his mouth and stared down the walk at William Angora. "Thought you were going to skip Brooksmet," he added. "What made you change your mind?"

"The goat," Jake answered. "He was just set on coming down into this town. I never saw such a goat when he gets—"

Two men stepped around the side of the house, and Jake's tongue halted in mid air. One of the men was Selectman Bock, glaring venomously. The other was a broad-chested, white-mustached man with a convex stomach. He was clad in a uniform, and the blue of the cloth was accented by the gold of his badge and the braid on his sleeves.

Jake's heart was weighted down by the sight of that gold. Not only had Selectman Bock got a policeman to arrest him, but he had got the chief of police.

"There they are!" Bock shouted, pointing a damning finger. "Confering together, just like I told you, chief! We got 'em with the goods.

'Arrest 'em both!"

Frank Carpenter descended the steps of his house, as if to confirm, at closer range, both words and men.

"Hello, Rogers!" he said to the police chief. "What's your hysterical friend yipping about?"

"Don't let him soft-soap you!" Bock roared in the policeman's ear. "I'm charging them both—the dirty plotters!—and there's the goat!"

Chief Rogers cleared his throat. He pointed a finger beyond Frank Carpenter, at the paralyzed figure of Jake Partland.

"You're under arrest, you," he said in a deep, authoritative voice. Then, much less certainly, he went on: "Mr. Carpenter, I'm sorry to say that Mr. Bock here is making a serious charge against you, too."

Frank Carpenter laughed.

"Well, who've I been killing now?" he inquired.

"I—I got a license," Jake Partland quavered uncertainly. "I got it tucked into my camera."

Nobody paid any attention to him.

"I've got you right where I want you, Frank Carpenter!" Selectman Bock said triumphantly. "The chief here saw you conferring with this goat fellow that you've imported into town to cheat me out of the election. I can't be beat twice on the same gag!"

"What?" Frank Carpenter's head jerked back, and he laughed again, louder than ever. Chief Rogers shifted from one official foot to the other, and stared at him as he went on: "You mean to tell me you think I brought this man and his goat in here? You mean to tell me that's what you want to arrest me for?"

"I come of my own accord," Jake Partland put in, though he shot a reproachful glance at the goat as he said it. "Let me get that license to show ye!"

He edged past them, toward William Angora and the express wagon. His going was quite unheeded. Select-

man Bock was glaring at the garage owner, and Carpenter was grinning at Selectman Bock. Chief Rogers shifted his eyes from one to the other in unison with his uneasy weight.

"Conspiracy, election fraud, unduly influencing the voters, an' disorderly conduct are what I'm charging you with," said Bock. "I've got the chief as a witness, too. We'll see if you can swindle me out of the election by making a laughing stock of me!"

"Grave charges, Mr. Carpenter," said the chief solemnly, and shook his head. "Very grave charges!"

Frank Carpenter stared at him. More particularly he stared downward at Rogers's uneasy feet.

"Then I'm pinched, am I?" he demanded of the chief.

Mr. Rogers coughed.

"Wonder if I couldn't act as peace-maker here?" he suggested, and his mouth broadened in a smile not wholly successful. "Maybe Mr. Bock would be willing to compromise. Suppose you withdraw from the election and he withdraw his—his grave charges!"

"Nothing doing!" snapped Carpenter. He walked down his gravel pathway, his feet crunching determinedly. "Come on, chief—I'm your prisoner. I don't need a hat to be arrested!"

IV

RATHER uncertainly Chief Rogers followed.

"I won't compromise on nothing!" Bock declared, following, too.

At the curb Jake Partland flagged them with his license.

"Here it is," he said eagerly.

The chief stopped promptly and took it from Jake's hand.

"It's a good license," he muttered somewhat haltingly, and shot a questioning, almost an appealing glance at Selectman Bock. "Ah—uh—does this—ah—change the case any, Har—Mr. Bock?"

Mr. Bock stared bitterly at the goat, and then at the defiant Carpenter. His

face, always red, became almost maroon.

Carpenter answered the selectman's angry eyes by tightening his fists. There was a pregnant pause.

The goat turned his head toward them. His beard was wagging solemnly, and his eyes, red-rimmed, were as formidable in aspect as any other pair of eyes in that belligerent group.

Unostentatiously Jake Partland retreated behind his camera. The two candidates were big men, with material for at least four Jake Partlands in them; and the police chief, though more worried than mad, probably carried a gun. Under those circumstances a camera was poor enough shelter for a man who invariably got licked. However, Jake gripped the legs of the tripod tentatively and kept an eye on Selectman Bock.

Chief Rogers extended the license to Bock.

"That's a peddler's license," said the selectman. "It doesn't give an outsider permission to come in here with a smelly public nuisance of a goat!" He leveled a quivering, disdainful finger at William Angora. "Especially not to campaign against one of the town's own officers with this malefactor here!" He shifted his finger of scorn to indicate Frank Carpenter.

"Got your handcuffs with you, chief?" the garage man inquired grimly. "You better handcuff me quick, or you'll have me for assault as well as—look out!"

Apparently William Angora had had sufficient time to ponder Selectman Bock's words and finger; and, having pondered them, the red-eyed goat had decided that they were inimical. Having been connected with the navy, he did not share Jake Partland's inhibition against fights. His eyes flicked from Jake's face to that portion of Selectman Bock that was not confronting Frank Carpenter. He coiled himself up like the spring of an eight-day

clock, and the red eyes glinted balefully. His hoofs dug into the pavement.

Man has evolved. At the very moment when Frank Carpenter was mouthing sincere threats of violence toward Selectman Bock, he observed the goat's preparations for similar violence. Instead of letting nature take her course, instinctively he sprang forward with a shout and pulled Bock aside just as the horned and hoofed projectile cut loose. The goat, followed by the red and white express wagon, grazed Selectman Bock's trousers with almost enough speed to ignite them.

For an instant the two enemies were locked in each other's arms. Then, whole-heartedly, they broke away.

"Whoa!" said Carpenter to the goat, and laid a powerful hand upon its horns just as William Angora was reforming to continue the attack. He lifted the goat almost clear of the pavement. Then he turned toward Jake Partland. "Come here and tame this—" he began, and stopped.

Another tableau was on. Selectman Bock, forgetful of his late peril, was standing motionless, stricken by the sight of Jake Partland.

Jake was standing behind his camera—the only position in which he ever looked at home. One hand gripped the tripod; the other was upon the rubber bulb that controlled the shutter. He looked like a really efficient photographer. He, too, was quite motionless—with fright. Not yet did he realize wholly that he, who had been a mere hanger-on at the fringe of this warfare, was now the central figure in it.

"Did you dare to take a picture of that goat tryin' to butt me?" shrieked Selectman Bock.

Jake's answer was drowned in a nasal wail of fury from the goat.

"Did you dare? Did you?" shrieked Bock.

"I'll give you a hundred for the negative!" Frank Carpenter shouted. "Me nobly rescuing Bock from his he-

reditary enemy, the goat! It 'll go big! It don't matter how bad it is—I'll give you a hundred for it!"

Jake moved his jaws, but his vocal cords were mute.

"You'll give nothing!" Selectman Bock yelled. "More conspiracy! You, Rogers, take that camera away from that man!"

"Nothing doing," said Carpenter emphatically. "That film is Exhibit A in my defense—me saving Bock from the goat. Of course, chief"—he turned politely to the bewildered police official—"if you want to suppress that evidence, you can. I'm your prisoner, you know, and I can't do anything to stop you—not now I can't."

Despite the fact that his brain was very much in a whirl, Chief Rogers caught the significance of those last four words.

A not inconsiderable number of Brooksmet's citizens were coming down Elm Street, although the gang from the town hall still lingered at a distance. Not all those in sight were Bock partisans, by any means. Whatever action he took now was public and official.

"You better slap the handcuffs on me and the photographer and the goat, chief," Frank Carpenter said softly. "First thing you know somebody 'll be accusing you of trying to scare me out of the election by staging a fake arrest. The sooner you get me into jail, the better chance you'll have of throwing all the blame on Bock."

Bock gritted his teeth hungrily at the agitated police chief.

"You try to throw anything on me—" he began, and stopped.

Chief Rogers took the bull by the horns as Carpenter held the goat.

"I'm sure we can clear up this misunderstanding in a little private talk," he declared. "Come into Carpenter's house, everybody—the goat, too—and we'll thresh it out."

"I'd rather be arrested," said the garage owner firmly.

However, he followed the police chief, towing the goat and the express wagon behind him. Bock, with a glance at the thickening crowd, moved after them. Jake Partland had already shouldered his camera, and with a protecting arm around the lens he brought up the rear.

V

FIFTY-FIVE minutes later Jake stood beside the refreshment stand at Carpenter's garage. He was eating a frankfurter. Beside him a pacified goat was devouring a double portion of fodder.

"That's an unusual goat, that is," Jake asserted. "I never saw such a goat."

"He's a good omen, too," the garage owner declared. "Of course I've promised not to speak a word about that goat till after election, but everybody knows it, anyhow. I'm as good as elected right now, and Bock would tell you the same, if he was given to telling the truth!"

Jake Partland turned his head to view a light delivery car, with a box body, that stood before the garage. It was an old and travel-worn car, but indubitably a piece of automotive machinery, nevertheless. In this there rested, on a pile of hay, the red and white express wagon.

"That's a mighty swell car you're

selling me for seventy-five dollars," he said gratefully.

"Well, she'll run," said Carpenter with a deprecatory gesture. "You'll find her good on the hills, too."

"That's where I'll need her most," Jake assured him. "That goat—it don't make no difference to him whether the scenery's all on end or laid out flat, but me—I'm different."

He pondered, studying the animal's sober countenance as it masticated its fodder with leisurely assurance.

"I suppose you're right; I'm entitled to that seventy-five dollars damages for false arrest from Bock," he said slowly. "Just the same, it was a mighty clever idea of William Angora to bleat so loud when I was saying to them that I hadn't taken any picture of him trying to butt Bock. If the goat hadn't drowned me out—"

"That goat's a better politician than Bock is," Carpenter averred solemnly.

Just then the goat looked up. The old urge to move was in his eye.

"Well, we better be going," said Jake hastily. "Get aboard, William Angora!"

But he paused after coaxing the goat aboard. Then, with his engine clattering assuredly, he yelled down into the garage man's ear.

"That goat 'll have me in an imported limousine yet, if I'm not careful!" he said.

SEEING

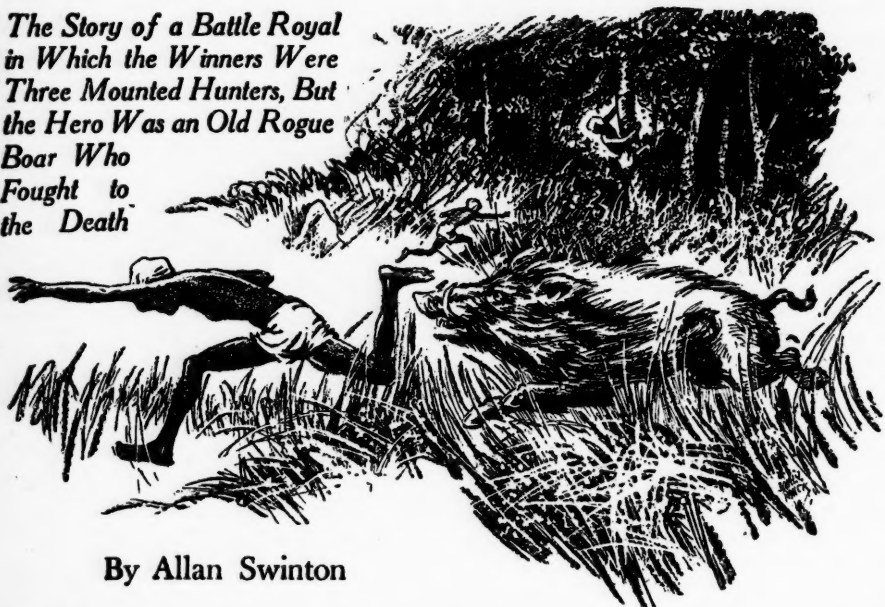
He longed for beauty, and he found it hard
To live where circumstances said he must;
He hated all his place, the tumbled yard,
The little crouching house all gray with dust
And fashioned in a style of long ago—
He hated it; and longed for beauty so.

He quested far for beauty, found it hard
To go back home when duty said he must—
And found an artist painting in his yard
A picture of the house all gray with dust;
The artist, trained to vision long ago,
Found beauty there, for he loved beauty so!

Charlotte Mish

Pigstickers

*The Story of a Battle Royal
in Which the Winners Were
Three Mounted Hunters, But
the Hero Was an Old Rogue
Boar Who
Fought to
the Death*



By Allan Swinton



DAMS leaned very comfortably against the trunk of a huge and ancient sal tree, listening to the faint yells and clangings of the beaters. It was nine o'clock of an October morning, but the sun was already oppressively hot. The big tree stood in a scrubby clearing twenty yards from the virgin jungle, whose tangled mass of lush vegetation rose like a sheer cliff before him. To his right, about fifty yards off, he could see Newberry, who sat in an attitude of dejection on the top of an old ant hill, and he knew that Marshall was on his left, concealed from his sight by tall scrub.

So profound was the silence that the beaters' distant clamor seemed rather to accentuate than to disturb it. There was no wind, and the sun, already high, blazed fiercely down from a hard, turquoise sky. The air quivered with heat and reeked with the unmistakable, never to be forgotten smell of the jun-

gle—a heavy, moist, and indescribably cloying odor which has, nevertheless, a sort of undertone of sharpness, and which seems to penetrate to one's very marrow.

Adams picked up his gun, which was leaning against the tree beside him. It was so hot that he had to move his grip continually. He polished the stock absent-mindedly with his arm.

Neither of the three men were taking much interest in operations as yet, for it would be at least thirty minutes before the drive could reach them. Nothing moved except for the vultures wheeling eternally in the high blue, and the ceaseless fluttering of gorgeous butterflies across the flower-spangled face of the jungle.

The minutes slipped by, and the yells and beating of gongs and drums came nearer, till at last a yellow, skulking, doglike shape slipped from the trees and slunk from cover to cover. At sight of the jackal, Adams reached for his gun again and idly loaded it. As

the beast approached, he tossed a stick in its direction and smiled at the wild leap that it made; for in India one does not shoot jackals, or any beast which acts as scavenger to that carrion-ridden, sewerless land. He knew that the game, if any was in the cover, would soon appear, and he felt grateful at the prospect of action.

In a little while a troop of monkeys came in sight along the jungle face, not at all perturbed, but merely, it seemed, in the course of their post-prandial constitutional. Adams tucked his hot gunstock under his arm and waited, till at last, with a scurry and an invigorating whirl of wings, a covey of jungle fowl, or moorghies—the original progenitors of the familiar farmyard chicken—burst from cover and came skimming over the scrub straight toward him.

He waited for another moment, then knocked the brilliantly plumaged cock bird out of the flock before they reached him, and, swinging, dropped another with his left barrel as they passed. His spaniel, which had been sleeping at his feet, slipped quietly off and retrieved the birds. Adams rubbed the dog with his foot, never taking his eyes away from the cover.

Then he heard shots to his right, and in a little while more moorghies came his way, with which he dealt to the extent of two from each covey. Next, with a hollow drumming of heavily beating wings, a peacock and three hens swept down to him, offering an easy shot; but he did not fire, out of sentiment born in stately gardens in England. Three pheasants that followed, however, he treated with scant ceremony; and when another bunch of seven peafowl flew by, he felt that he had already paid sufficient tribute to sentiment.

"Here's a good roast, anyway," he muttered, and killed the cock, which fell with a heavy thud at his feet.

As he reloaded, he heard a shout on his left. Turning in that direction, he

saw Marshall put his hands to his head with the fingers spread—the Bhil sign for a deer—and point to the trees half-way between the two men. Adams snapped out his shells and slipped in a couple of cases with solid bullets, watching intently for the deer to show. In a few minutes he saw the antlered head glancing between two bushes, and slipped up the safety catch; but he waited a long time without further sight of the game.

At length his attention was caught by a movement in the dense foliage, and, looking carefully, he thought he saw a brownish gray leg and shoulder standing motionless. He waited intently until at last the animal moved again, satisfying him that it was the deer. Following its progress along the jungle face for several yards, without actually sighting it, at last he saw its shoulder again, and he fired quickly.

There was no answer to the shot. Nothing moved, and Adams waited for many minutes, tensely watching as the beat came closer and closer. A number of moorghies and peafowl broke during that time, and he heard the others shooting; but he thought he had killed his deer, and he was expecting another, for the barking deer of Assam live in pairs.

Although the beaters were now so near that he knew they would soon come through the jungle face, and the drive would be over, no deer showed. He was just thinking with chagrin of the birds he had neglected, when from the cover there came shouts of a very different kind from those which had hitherto made the morning hideous.

These were screams and yells of fear, followed by cries of warning and wild imprecations in Hindustani. Soon panic-stricken coolies came dashing through the trees in all directions, some running into the open, and others trying to climb to safety. Thinking that a leopard had been driven, Adams looked to his gun, tied his dog to a tree, and waited.

Suddenly from the jungle there burst a coolie in a red *dhuti*, who did not yell, but seemed to be conserving his wind as he ran madly into the open, obviously cherishing an earnest desire to cover the greatest possible distance in the shortest possible time. Adams slipped up his safety catch and watched, till hard on the frantic heels of the coffee-colored boy there came a gaunt gray form which galloped clumsily, but wonderfully swiftly, on three legs. The fourth, broken by Adams's bullet, dangled, but seemed in nowise to discommode its owner.

It was a wild boar, and even in the excitement of the moment the man wondered whether the libations of the night before might so affect his senses as to make him see things twice as large as they really were; for the brute was colossal in size—a foot taller at the shoulder than any boar has a right to be. It was very, very old—grizzled with age, long of tusk and scarred of side, a rogue pig which had long ranged alone, as an old elephant often does.

The native in the red *dhuti* continued to extend himself, with the boar upon his heels, until an ant hill providentially became available, and he scaled it barely in time to avoid the slavered tusks. Adams, seizing a chance when the boy was out of his line of fire, took a shot at the formidable beast. The rear end of a three-legged boar, going at a gallop, is a difficult target, and the bullet merely raked along the old fellow's ribs, causing him to gambol on three legs like a kitten, and grunt and squeal with rage.

Before Adams could fire again, the boar was in the light scrub. Being too experienced a hunter to follow any wounded game—especially a pig—into cover, he reloaded and sought a point of vantage from which he could watch for the next move.

Sportsmen and naturalists in Europe, Asia, and Africa are agreed that of all animals the wild boar is the

fiercest fighter. Attacked, he only knows one plan of action—to charge upon his enemy, and to continue to charge as long as he can stand, or as long as there is any one left to tackle. With his gameness he combines extreme agility and an uncanny power of anticipating his adversary's moves. This reduces the usual ruses of sudden stoppings and doublings to great uncertainty; for if the hunter doubles, it may prove that the pig has been working him into a position where he can only do so to the great advantage of his pursuer. Should the man suddenly stop, the pig can stop no less quickly, for his brain seems to function instantly.

These things being so, wise men use much discretion in hunting the boar on foot. When the animal is a monster four feet high and wild with rage, discretion will hardly do to describe the extreme caution with which he should be approached; so Adams moved gingerly, with a watchful and roving eye, as he worked his way to the mount of an old ant hill from which he might get a better view.

He knew that his two companions would be closing in, and he expected to get a clean shot before long; but he prayed that the beast might break cover close at hand, for there were no rifles in the party, and a twelve-bore with a bullet, though an ideal weapon at close quarters, is not at all accurate at a range of more than about fifty yards.

Before he could reach the point for which he was heading, there was a fresh outburst of terrified yells, and a coolie came dashing out of the scrub with the lurching gray form of the old boar at his heels. Adams caught his breath to see how close they were; and even as he watched the pig overhauled the native and swept him from his feet with a sidewise flirt of his massive head. He heard the coolie's scream of agony, and saw the vicious rip of the boar's tusks; but before he could

move, the latter left his man and re-entered the jungle from which he had originally been driven.

Adams ran hard to the prostrate native, getting there just before Marshall, but the man was already dead. Three ribs had been ripped from his body by those terrible tusks and stood hideously erect in the air. Knowing the habits of wild boars, neither white man made any comment other than a muttered exclamation of pity, but immediately turned to face the cover.

By this time most of the beaters seemed to have melted into thin air, and the three white men and the dead coolie were all that could be seen, except for a few natives perched aloft in trees. The three faced the jungle, waiting for the charge they expected; but the minutes ticked by and it did not come. They slowly approached the trees till they were as near as they could get without danger of being charged in cover, where they could not shoot; but the old pig made no sign.

All that day they waited, trying one means after another to draw the wounded boar. Little by little the bolder coolies returned, and the dead native was taken away. Though the three waited until dark, and tried all kinds of methods to get the pig to charge, they were unsuccessful; and night found them back at Adams's bungalow, feverishly arguing as to just how big the brute was.

"Anyway," said Marshall, "we'll never see him again. That leg will poison, and he'll die;" and they went on to discuss the matter of compensation for the dead boy's parents.

II

As such wonders do, in a day or two the incident of the huge old boar began to slip into the vast limbo where such stories remain until brought to light by some one who wants to outdo a companion's tallest tale. Four days later, however, Adams was riding through his estate—he was a tea plant-

er in Assam—on his way back to his siesta, when a breathlessly excited coolie dashed up to tell him, between sobs, that a wild pig as big as an elephant had charged a group of men who were clearing jungle for a new nursery, and had massacred them to a man—all except the speaker, who had managed to escape owing to his great skill and valor.

Adams grunted. It does not do to get too much excited over the tales of natives without looking into the evidence. He kicked up his pony and cantered to the clearing, where he found a coolie with a long gash from knee to hip, which had fortunately missed the great artery. He satisfied himself beyond all doubt that his boar of Sunday was responsible—for three-legged pigs of enormous bulk are not common—and rode thoughtfully homeward.

The estate was surrounded on three sides by the virgin jungle, and on the fourth by that waste of whitened sands which in the wet season is the Brahmaputra. In winter the great stream is confined to a channel not more than a mile wide, but with the advent of the rains it spreads till it covers all the sands, looking more like an elongated lake than a river. This year the water was particularly low, and the sands stretched for miles before the channel could be reached. Between the green jungle and the bare white sands ran a belt of kuggaree—white-plumed elephant grass about ten feet high—several hundred yards in width.

From the day of the first attack there began a reign of terror on Adams's plantation such as has seldom been recorded anywhere. The old boar's wounded leg seemed to be healing, and he was evidently devoting his time to avenging himself on those who had injured him. Every few days he would charge, grunting savagely and ripping with his tusks, into some band of coolies, and in a couple of weeks it was impossible to get a native to turn

out to work.

The pig seemed to be circling around the jungle that inclosed the place, and so far he had never attacked when either of the *sahibs* was near. The whole estate was utterly demoralized, and the white men were powerless to do anything.

The cover from which the boar had first been driven was an isolated patch within the plantation—he had been caught there by accident—but now he was ranging in the limitless main jungle. No coolie could be persuaded to try to drive him, even when he had been located, and elephants were useless, for the pig could easily double past them in the cover. A deadlock ensued, and the blazing Assam sunlight beheld the unusual spectacle of a million dollars' worth of assets standing idle, and three disgruntled and blasphemous Englishmen absolutely euchred by a three-legged pig with a grievance.

One day, after five, during which not a stroke of work had been done on the place, the three planters sat on Adams's veranda with gin slings at their elbows. The thing had got past the funny stage, and they were very blankly wondering what to do next.

"S'pose it's our move," said Adams. "He moved last. Hell, it's too ridiculous!"

A brown Dom boy—the Doms are the river men of the Brahmaputra—trotted up and salaamed. Adams signed to him to speak.

"*Huzoor*," he said, "the great boar upon three legs lies in the kuggaree, close to the ghat trail. I have seen his tracks not one hour old."

"What the devil's the good of that?" growled Newberry. "How are we goin' to get a shot at him, anyway?"

"I know, I know," replied Adams irritably; "but we'll have to get the elephants out and go into the kuggaree on the off chance. It's a slim one, but it's the best we can do."

So they ordered out the seven elephants which worked on the place, and which were used for hunting when occasion offered. They were preparing to start when suddenly Marshall emitted a loud shout.

"What's up now?" growled Adams, who was very sour at the state of affairs.

Marshall seemed quite excited.

"Listen!" he said. "I've got an idea which isn't quite so crazy as it may sound. We'll get your boar, and incidentally we'll have the finest morning's sport that's been seen in this valley for many a long year. See that wind?"

There was a strong, steady breeze—an unusual thing for that country.

"It blows straight for the river," Marshall went on, "and you know it won't go down till evening. Right-o! Let's send a man between the jungle and the kuggaree, to set the grass on fire, and we'll wait on the sands and stick the old blighter when he bolts. I've a whole bundle of hog spears in my bungalow."

Adams whistled in surprise and broke into a grin of delight.

"Bill, you're a genius! Gad, to stick that pig! I believe it can be done."

"That's all right for you blamed cavalry men," protested Newberry—the other two were former officers of native cavalry, and had stuck many a pig in the sand and scrub of Kathiawar and Bikaner—"but I've never stuck any pork. How's it done, anyway?"

"Oh, that 'll be all right, sonny! We'll coach you. You can ride your best pony, and run if necessary. We'll do the spear work. You can flank us."

Pigsticking, one of the most exciting and dangerous of all sports, is followed in India wherever the country is sufficiently open to make it possible. In fact, it is considered a grave breach of etiquette to shoot pig in any district in which they may be ridden at. Assam, however, is so densely wooded

that the sport is practically impossible, and the boar is considered merely as an ordinary game animal; so Marshall's suggestion was unique.

Then, too, a pig horse is a specially trained animal, requiring qualities, particularly courage, above the ordinary. Each of the three men, however, owned a string of polo ponies; and after much heated argument the upshot was that noon found them each on his chosen mount, its legs well bandaged, with a short, stiff hog spear across his saddle bow. They halted on the road to the river, just where the jungle joined the kuggaree, while Adams gave final instructions to four men on an elephant, who were to fire the grass. The wind still blew strongly in just the right direction.

When the elephant's huge gray bulk lurched off into the cover, the three horsemen wound down the trail to the sands, the two lancers coaching the dubious and skeptical Newberry in the tactics of the dangerous sport.

"It's all very well for you fellows, but Bella"—Newberry referred to his pony—"cost me fifteen hundred excellent rupees. S'pose your confounded old pig rips her up?"

"Oh, don't you worry, old man! We'll do the spear work. All you have to do, as I told you, is to flank us all the time. Ride him if he comes your way, and keep him going till we pass you; then wheel to whichever flank is vacant, and wait there to ride him again if he jinks your way."

"Jink"—derived from a Kathiawari word—in the jargon of pigsticking serves to indicate that lightning double which the boar can execute so cleverly, turning and getting off to a good start in the other direction before even the best of ponies can stop.

So Newberry, still grumbling, nodded.

"All right!" he said. "It's your funeral, I s'pose. Where do you prod 'em, anyway? May as well take advantage of the opportunity to extend

my education. This blessed harpoon sharp enough?"

III

At length they came to where the Dom had found the signs. Sure enough, there were the unmistakable tracks of a three-legged pig; so they spread themselves out about two hundred yards from the kuggaree face and the same distance apart, and settled down to wait.

It was very hot, and the miles of glistening sands reflected the dazzling sunlight pitilessly.

The ponies chafed and fretted, as did the men themselves. In a little while down the wind came the tang of a whiff of smoke, causing the animals to fling up their heads. The men fingered their spears and watched the face of the grass. Nothing moved there but weaver birds and mynahs, which fluttered ceaselessly to and fro.

Soon thin curls of acrid blue vapor came down in thickening wreaths, and behind the belt of kuggaree the hunters could see smoke rising in dense clouds. For a long time, however, nothing came out of the grass but whirring flights of tetur, the delectable black partridge, and a myriad small birds.

The fire was traveling fast, fanned by the high wind, and the smoke became so dense that the men's eyes began to smart. Adams rubbed his with the back of his hand, reflecting that if it got much thicker he wouldn't be able to see the boar when it charged.

When he looked up again, there before him, lurching leisurely along, close to the face of the kuggaree, was the enemy whom they sought. The boar did not seem to have seen the men; but Adams, glancing off to his left, saw Marshall riding hard for the grass front, as had been arranged, in an effort to turn the boar into the open.

To distract the quarry's attention, Adams cantered in and shouted. At the sound, the boar at once turned to face him, with its lowered head swing-

ing sullenly from side to side. Adams waved his hat, and the beast lurched a few lengths toward him, to stop again.

All the while Marshall was sweeping down along the edge of the kuggaree, coming very fast. So soft was the sand, and so intent the pig on Adams, that if the beast had not turned just when it eventually did, Marshall would have ended the hunt there and then with a spearhead behind its shoulder. As it was, the pig wheeled, by chance, just in time to turn aside the lance, which nevertheless pricked his flank. That was enough. With a furious squeal the old warrior lurched after the pony.

All three men turned and rode for the open sands, as they had planned to do, to get the boar as far from cover as possible before he gave up the pursuit. Marshall pulled his mount, so that the pig could close a little. When at last the beast stopped, he was a long way from cover, and the three horsemen circled and rode hard to get between him and it. Then they wheeled and came down on him three abreast, about fifty yards apart.

Adams, who was in the center, pushed his mount into a dead run and couched his spear. The trick in killing a pig that faces you is to shorten your grip and throw down your point on him just as you pass, transfixing him from above, behind the shoulder; but the animal very seldom waits for this. This boar did, however. More—he put down his head and charged furiously.

Adams was so much disconcerted by this sudden attack that his spear struck the enormously thick hide of the beast's withers, and was wrenched from his grip, almost unhorsing the man at the same time. He recovered his seat just as the pig swung to follow him. Being quite defenseless, he had no choice but to run, which he did, taking care to lead his pursuer farther from cover.

Soon he wheeled, leading the game across the course of Marshall, who was

riding to meet him. Marshall did not get quite near enough, but at the risk of a fall he leaned from his saddle and his lance struck the boar's flank. Clearing his point in the approved regimental style, the cavalryman passed on, while Adams rode hard for his spear, thanking his gods that he had learned to pick things up from the saddle.

The sight would have been an inspiring one, if there had been any to see it—the dazzling expanse of sand, the three circling horsemen, and the game old boar wheeling, shaking his head furiously, and looking from one man to another for the likeliest direction in which to charge.

Here Newberry, who had been off on his own flank, decided to take a hand. In defiance of all the rules of the game, he came tearing down on the pig before the others were in position to flank him and stop the quarry if it bolted. At first his pony did as she was asked, running straight and hard, as a good polo pony should, till within twenty yards of the huge pig that faced her. Then she decided that she did not like the look of things, and propped hard with her fore feet, just as the boar lurched into his grotesque, but purposeful three-legged gallop.

The man tried wildly to push her on, and then to swing her, but she only went on at a canter, and in a moment the pig and the pony met. The boar's great head butted full into Bella's belly, his high, sharp withers striking Newberry's foot. The rider felt his mare leap spasmodically as the cruel tusks tore her body, and then a great groan left her as she went to her knees and dropped, trapping her rider's foot on the opposite side from the boar. She heaved and plunged for a moment, and then lay quiet, her legs beating wildly. The air was filled with the furious grunts of the pig, which charged the prostrate beast again and again.

Newberry, on the other side of the unlucky pony, pinned down in the hot sand, seized the only chance and lay

still, trying to think of some suitable prayer for such a moment. He had not been hurt, and he lay with his face in the sand, listening to the terrifying sounds of the boar's rage.

Suddenly the grunting stopped. He heard a rush of hoofs in the sand, and felt it fly over him. Then all was silence.

After awhile, with his heart in his mouth, inch by inch he raised his head until he saw the boar about two hundred yards away, chasing one man and pursued by the other. A spear was sticking straight up from the animal's back, but the sturdy old fighter seemed to be as strong as ever. With one hunter *hors de combat*, and another disarmed, the odds were on the quarry should he decide to take cover again.

Newberry's foot was still held by the dead pony's body, though the sand—which was soaked with poor Bella's blood—was too soft to hurt his leg. As he tried to wriggle free, he saw Marshall, the pursuer, overtake the pig. His lance went down, but the thrust was unsuccessful, and the boar turned, leaving Adams, who straightway rode for the dead pony, obviously thinking to get the fallen rider's spear.

This did not suit Newberry at all, but he seized the weapon, which he could reach, and stuck it upright in the ground, before cuddling down into the sand again in an earnest attempt to look as dead as possible. He heard the rush of Adams's horse as it passed him. When he ventured to look up again, he saw the game of pursuer and pursued still going on.

Suddenly Adams, who was now the pursuer, stopped and turned to gallop in the opposite direction. Newberry wondered at this, not knowing that it was a time-honored ruse when only two men remain to deal with a determined beast. They ride in opposite directions on a wide circle, the one who is chased by the pig allowing him to get close enough to hold all his attention, and leading him on to meet the

other man, who passes as close as possible, and thus gets a chance to use his spear.

As Adams, having decided to try these tactics, swung his pony, he breathed a short prayer. He wished devoutly that he had never tackled the brute on polo ponies, and wondered frantically whether Newberry was dead or alive. Then he gritted his teeth, and rode steadily to make the best of the coming opportunity.

Soon the circle was almost complete, and he saw Marshall riding to meet him. That worthy flourished his hog spear and shouted.

"Fool!" thought Adams. "All his fault!"

Then his teeth set as he saw the brute close behind his friend's pony. His spear went down, and his world narrowed to a circle of white sand in which lurched a huge, high-shouldered, lean-rumped boar.

The horses rushed to meet each other, and in an instant Marshall's grinning face flashed by. Then Adams saw the grizzled, bristly head with the yellow, foam-hung tusks, and marked the spot for his thrust.

Too late the old boar saw him come. The other spear had fallen from the beast's back, and Adams placed his lance head fairly behind the shoulder, giving all his weight to it as he passed. As the shaft was wrenched from his grip, he wheeled, to see the boar standing with heaving sides, and with foam-flecked blood pouring from his open mouth. In a little while the gallant old fighter went to his knees and rolled over.

Adams wheeled again and galloped for the place where Newberry still lay helpless. He reached it just as Marshall pulled his friend's foot from under the dead pony.

"I don't like pigsticking," the latter announced truculently, regarding his blood-soaked leg. "What I want to know is, which of you two fools is going to buy me a new horse?"



Telling How the Pretty Daughter of Léon Laflamme Turned the Tables on Jacques Rouleau, Who Undertook to Kidnap Her

The Trail to Bon Désir

By William Merriam Rouse



THE cabin of Omer Constant, on the shore of the Lac des Sables, had never seemed so fair to any eyes as to those of Jacques Rouleau, as he came out of the bush and halted in a profound winter stillness. The cabin was a joy to the heart of Jacques because the friendship of old Omer was his dependence in this hour of need. It was beautiful to his gaze because it lay like a pale, gleaming gem in that setting of pure white.

Constant had squared the logs and tinted the whitewash with which he covered them so that the cabin was pink and yellow, pale blue and lavender, each side a different color, after

the fashion of some stone houses in the old parishes. It was like the afterglow of a northern sunset, and as unlike the dark and shaggy cabins of the choppers and trappers as Omer himself was unlike other men.

Rouleau dropped the tump line of his pack from his forehead and straightened a body as slender and strong as a hardhack sapling. In spite of burning haste, he had made the long march from Bon Désir, on the St. Lawrence, with thought for the longer and harder trail that was to come—a trail where his happiness, and perhaps his life, would depend upon the quality of his strength and courage. So he had slept well, and eaten just enough, and marched without driving

himself, as he came to seek the aid of his old friend; with the result that now his keen eyes were bright and his snow-shoes as light as feathers upon his feet.

He filled his lungs and cupped a mitten against his mouth.

"*Bonjour, la maison!*" he shouted, and the echoes came ringing back from the rugged heights of the Laurentians.

Rouleau had known that Omer was at home by the smoke that curled lightly up from the chimney, and by the trampled path that led to a water hole on the snow-covered lake. Now he was assured of it by the clamor of tongues from Constant's dogs—deep-toned baying that bespoke a strain of hound in the pack, a thunderous rumble that sounded like Great Dane or St. Bernard, and the *yap, yap, yap* bequeathed by more plebeian ancestry. Jacques smiled as he went on toward the cabin.

The dogs came rolling like an avalanche around a corner of the little building—five overgrown animals with every shade and fashion of coat known to the world of dogs. If Rouleau had been a stranger to them, it would have been well for him to stand and face them until the master of the cabin appeared; but he marched steadily into the pack, laughing and flinging up his rifle.

"Ha, Carlo! Minée! *Bonjour, Mousse! La Loutre! Couche là! Va-t'en! Bijou!*"

They swarmed against his legs, with yelps and snuffles and whines of excitement. As Rouleau waded through them, the door of the cabin opened, and there stood the small, erect figure of Omer Constant. Over one ear hung the tassel of a red woolen nightcap, which he was prone to wear by day as well as night. Humorous eyes looked out from their bony caverns.

"A fine day, my son!" remarked Omer, as casually as if he and Jacques had parted within the hour; but not since early autumn had Rouleau been to the Lac des Sables.

"It is that," agreed Jacques, as he followed the old man indoors. "You have good health, Omer?"

"Naturally!" exclaimed Constant. "How could it be otherwise? I avoid the crowded parishes and associate only with my dogs; and as there are no women within a mile, trouble is at least a mile away!"

Jacques laughed, and sat down in an enormous homemade chair covered by a bearskin. He looked about the familiar room, which was, as always, exceedingly neat and well ordered. The windows were clean, the copper cooking dishes brightly polished, the floor carefully swept. On a bench by the fireplace Omer sat, regarding Rouleau, while he filled his short black pipe with extreme care. He stooped, and with a flashing movement his calloused fingers placed a coal on the well packed *tabac Canadien*. Blue clouds and a powerful odor drifted upon the warm air.

"Omer," began Jacques, "I have come to ask a great favor of you."

"*Eh bien!*" exclaimed the old man, after a moment. "If it is not too foolish, I will grant it. As I have said before, you are less of a fool than any young man I know; and therefore I—I have an affection for you!"

Constant scratched his parchment cheek and spat into the fire. This was nearer to sentiment than he ordinarily allowed himself to come, and Rouleau took hope.

"It is that I want to borrow your dogs, Omer," he said. He saw a change in the old man's eyes. "It is seldom," he went on hastily, "except in the country above the rivers, that one finds a man who has more than one dog trained to harness. I don't believe there are any dogs like yours on the whole coast of the St. Lawrence, from Quebec to the gulf. A horse will not do for the trails beyond the wood roads, as you know. I must have dogs capable of pulling a little more than a hundred pounds on a to-

boggan—about a hundred and ten, I should think."

"Ha!" barked Constant, when Rouleau had finished. There was a silence while the old man half obscured himself in blue smoke. "What is this hundred and ten pounds?" he asked at length.

"It is—" Jacques hesitated, coughed, and began over again. "It will be—girl!"

"*Saccagé chien!*" exploded Omer. "Girl?"

"Girl!" Jacques repeated firmly.

"What girl?"

"Do you know Ninon Laflamme, of Bon Désir?"

"I know her father, Léon Laflamme. He has curly whiskers as black as a crow's wing, and a temper blacker than the devil's own!"

"Ninon's hair is like her father's beard, and she is as beautiful as a June rose. Omer, her eyes are as deep as the summer night. They are sprinkled with stars, and her voice—"

"Have mercy!" croaked Constant. "I have heard all this before, of other girls!"

"There is no other like her in the world!"

"Of course not!" agreed Omer dryly. "For the sake of stopping you, I will admit it. So Mlle. Laflamme has agreed to elope with you? Knowing old Léon, I suspect it is like that."

"I am going to elope with her," corrected Jacques. "Ninon does not know it yet."

"She—" Omer gasped. "What madness is this?"

"I will tell you," replied Rouleau patiently. "You see, M. Laflamme is a notary. He is rich. Ninon is beautiful, and there are many, old and young, rich and not so rich, who would like to marry her. Me, I am poor and of the bush. In a village like Bon Désir, where boats stop every week in summer, I could not find any one to introduce me to Mlle. Laflamme. For three Sundays I went to mass just to

watch her. On the third Sunday she looked at me and smiled. This was very slow progress. At that rate I'd be ready for the next world by the time I got a chance to propose to her; so, my friend, I am going to steal her. I shall take her into the bush, to an empty *cabane* I know, where the forest is like the aisles of a cathedral, and there I shall ask her to marry me. I believe it is a very good plan. She will think it romantic."

"She is more likely to stab you, being the daughter of Laflamme!"

"I should not mind that," said Jacques. "It would be a sign of affection and interest."

"*Nom de Dieu!*" Constant was nearly speechless. "And if she will not marry you—which of course she will not?"

"In that case I shall take her home again. No doubt, if M. Laflamme does not shoot me, I shall die anyway."

"I have yet to see the corpse of a man who died for love!" muttered Omer. "I am much more worried about the trouble you are undoubtedly going to make for yourself than I am about your health."

"Be tranquil," said Rouleau. "I am very good at taking care of myself; and without her I do not want to live!"

"You may not want to live with her, after you try it!" growled Constant. "*Mon Dieu*, must I lose my good dogs on account of this young fool?"

"I can easily get a sled and one dog," said Jacques, "but my idea is to make speed. I shall, of course, be pursued."

"Pursued?" echoed the old man. "They will be on your trail like a pack of hounds! Without my dogs you will not have a chance!"

"That is what I thought, Omer."

Omer Constant rose, with his pipe set grimly between his jaws. He strode to one of the windows, his hard hands gripped behind his back. He looked out of doors; he turned and paced fu-

riously up and down the room, emitting a trail of smoke and growling curses to himself. Meanwhile Jacques Rouleau sat and waited in silence. He was confident that whatever happened to him, no harm would come to the dogs.

"*Bon Dieu!*" Omer stopped pacing at last, and confronted Jacques. "I suppose it is because I have no son that I am such a fool! Yes, and once I myself felt that way about a girl! It is folly, this scheme of yours. It is madness. Nevertheless, take the dogs! If any harm comes to them, and M. Laflamme does not deal properly with you, I shall nail up your hide on the cabin wall here! *Sacré*, I am an old fool! Come on, my son! We'll put them to harness on the toboggan, and I'll give you enough dried meat to feed them. If the girl knows anything, she'll marry you; but who ever heard of a woman that had any sense? Come on, before I change my mind, you scoundrel! I know less as I grow older! Be very careful of them, Jacques, and remember that they do not need the whip. They are true to the last breath!"

II

It was early evening in Bon Désir, and the bell of the church was tolling for vespers. In the one long street of the village the glow from many windows mingled with the light of a full moon. It had been a day of extreme cold, although bright and clear, and those who were going to church did not linger. Their steps creaked against the hard-packed snow of the highway, and they moved fast.

From the stone house of Léon Laflamme, notary and man of substance, came the gracefully moving figure of a girl. Her face was uplifted to the yellow disk that rode the sky in the pale blaze of its own glory. Jacques Rouleau, watching with his restive dogs huddled behind an unoccupied building on the opposite side of the

street, gathered all his courage. Now was the time!

"Up, Minée!" he said to the lead dog in a low voice. "*Marche donc!*"

Two and two, with Minée at their head, the dogs straightened against the harness. The long toboggan swung behind them, and Rouleau, with the lead rope in his hand, broke into a run.

They swept around the corner of the building and into the smooth roadway. At a brisk trot they swung down the unsuspecting street of Bon Désir; they passed the girl. She turned to look curiously at a sight that was unusual in her village—a five-dog team. At a sharp command from Jacques the dogs stopped. He turned back.

"Mlle. Laflamme!" he said.

The girl halted uncertainly. He thought that a gleam of recognition shone in her eyes—that she remembered having smiled at him in church.

"*Monsieur?*" she exclaimed, in a voice as gentle as a kitten's purr. "I do not think I know you."

"I am called Jacques Rouleau," he said. "Will you do me the honor to ride behind my dogs? I am going past the church."

Hesitating, she turned and looked back along the street. At that moment there was no one near. That it was a temptation for a girl of spirit, this opportunity to be whirled through Bon Désir by five plunging dogs, Rouleau knew very well.

Ninon Laflamme stepped closer and peered up into his face. He smiled, standing bareheaded with his fur *casque* in one hand and the lead rope in the other. Without a word, she dropped among the bearskins on the toboggan and lifted a small hand as a signal that she was ready.

"*Marche*, Minée!" cried Jacques. "Houp-là, Carlo! La Loutre! Mousse! Bijou! *Marche donc!*"

They spun over the surface, packed and polished by sled runners until it was almost as smooth as ice. Rouleau jumped upon the tail of the toboggan

and rode, shouting encouragement to the dogs. They passed the church; it was a mere flashing glimpse of tall lighted windows. The last few houses of Bon Désir whirled away behind them. Then they were out in the open country, with the long, narrow fields, snow-covered to the fence tops, stretching away on each side—the moon above and the hard road ahead, and five good dogs flattened out against the harness!

Jacques had seen Ninon Laflamme make a quick movement as they passed the church. Her head had turned, and she had flung one swift glance up into his face. After that she held herself rigid, looking straight ahead.

So they went on, faster than a horse could gallop, until they came to the wood road where Rouleau had planned to turn north toward the bush. He slowed down, and as they drew up to the turn he jumped from the toboggan. After this there would be no riding for him, for the dogs would have enough weight to pull over the uneven road.

As they turned, and Minée headed away north, Ninon Laflamme seized her opportunity. She flung off the bearskin that covered her knees and threw herself into the soft snow at the roadside. Certainly no one could deny that she was a marvel of agility.

Jacques stopped the dogs, stumbling from the force of their pull, and turned. The girl was already on her feet, facing him. She apparently had no intention of the panicky flight toward home to which a lesser soul might have resorted.

"Now, M. Jacques Rouleau!" she cried. "You will tell me why you have taken me out of Bon Désir, and then you will take me back as quickly as we came!"

"I have very much desired to tell you something, *mademoiselle*," he said, with a heart by no means as steady as his words. "For me, a mere woodsman, it was impossible to talk with the

daughter of Léon Laflamme. I am taking you where we shall not be disturbed for an hour or two while I make my explanations. I swear that no harm shall come to you."

"Do you know that my father will be at your heels, and men with him—all Bon Désir?"

"But yes! That is why we must hurry!"

"That is one reason why we are going back instantly! If I can keep my father from shooting you, it will be a miracle!"

"*Mademoiselle*, the dogs are restless. Will you be seated?"

Suddenly Rouleau saw half a dozen stars, on a night when there were no stars because of the full moon. He realized that the small but capable mitten of Mlle. Ninon Laflamme had hit him on the nose with a blow worthy of a man. He lifted her and set her down solidly on the toboggan.

"This is no time for nonsense," he told her severely. "I have told you that you were not going to be harmed."

"No, but you are!" she cried, in a voice choked by her wrath.

"*Marche!*" shouted Rouleau. "*'Pêche-toi, Minée!*"

They slithered and swung along the wood road, which began gently to rise as it neared the edge of the bush and the beginnings of the mountains. As they went into the dim arches of the forest, Ninon turned her head and hurled a single sentence at Jacques:

"You are as good as a dead man now, scoundrel!"

"An hour of your company is worth dying for, *mademoiselle*," he answered, running up beside the toboggan in the hope that she would talk some more. Even if he were only to hear abuse, he wanted her voice. Yes, if Jacques Rouleau had been in love with Ninon Laflamme when she smiled at him in the church of Bon Désir, he was mad with love for her now that she had hit him on the nose. Another girl would have screamed, fallen into hysterics,

tried to run, wept; but not this daughter of Léon Laflamme. Truly, she was worthy of the reputation of the Laflamme temper! Jacques chuckled to himself and decided to tell her that.

Mlle. Laflamme maintained her silence. Rouleau, looking down upon the top of her smart little fur cap as he traveled now behind and now at her side, felt that the situation would have seemed less dangerous if she had talked. A silent woman is either dangerous or stupid—he knew that. Ninon Laflamme could never be called stupid. She was thinking. She must be planning, and that was bad.

At the end of an hour of the fastest traveling of which Rouleau and the dogs were capable, they left the wood road. Jacques put on his snowshoes and broke trail for a short distance to a *cabane à sucre*—a little log structure, set in a grove of maples, which was used only in the sugar making season of the spring. He knew that this refuge would be empty in midwinter.

The dogs stopped. Rouleau took candles and matches from his pocket, pushed open the door, and went in to make a light and a fire before he brought the girl from her snug nest among the bearskins.

No sooner was he inside the cabin, waiting for a candle to burn up brightly, than he heard the sound of Ninon's voice.

"*Marche donc!*" she cried. "*Marche, Minée!*"

He rushed out, but the wise leader had refused to start without his presence. Ninon was standing beside the toboggan, cracking the lead rope, and it seemed to him that he heard her say something a little stronger than "*Marche!*" when Minée merely turned her head and wagged her long tail at the command.

"*Mademoiselle,*" said Jacques, "I admire your spirit; but since you are trying to get away, I must ask you to come inside while I build a fire."

"You will admire my spirit more

before morning!" snapped Mlle. Laflamme, but she obeyed, and went ahead of him into the cabin.

Rouleau lighted more candles and stuck them in their own grease on a bench. He made a fire in the sheet iron stove, but before he went about this he took care that he was between his rifle and the girl. He had come to have a wholesome respect for her ability to look out for herself.

When he went out to see that the dogs were bedded down comfortably under a little shed, where firewood was piled at one end of the cabin, he took the rifle with him. He left the dogs in harness, for his fate would be decided soon, and it would be necessary to move, whatever that fate might be.

When he went indoors again, Ninon Laflamme sat staring at the stove. Her coat was of mink, and the little cap had been made to match it. His heart sank, for they had cost a great deal of money, that coat and cap; but oh, how fair the curls were against the whiteness of her neck, and how beautiful were the curves of the small chin that she thrust into the air at sight of him!

Her black eyes studied him as he stood before her, his *casque* in his hand, and his rumpled brown hair damp upon his forehead.

"And now!" she exclaimed. "What have you to say for yourself? This is a very serious matter!"

III

"I HAVE stolen you," replied Jacques, drawing a long breath for courage, "because I want to marry you."

"*Dieu Seigneur!*" The girl's expression did not change, but her voice became exceedingly sarcastic. "How do you expect to do that without my consent, and without a priest? The banns, I suppose, you have had published?"

"I could take you to the home of my old friend, Omer Constant, who is a hermit, and who lives on the Lac des

Sables. From there we could go to Les Grandes Bergeronnes, for instance, and get married."

"Ah, I have known you such a long time! Did you think I would consent to such madness?"

It seemed to Jacques Rouleau that this adventure was somehow getting away from him. He did not know exactly what to do about it. Alone in the bush and drunk with the romance of his own heart, he had seen the affair in an entirely different light. Yes, he had been drunk, but this girl seemed to be quite sober. However, Jacques was a man of courage, and he plunged on, trusting for guidance to whatever good angel might take his case in hand.

"Ninon Laflamme," he said earnestly, sitting down on a bench in front of her, "after I had seen you three times in Bon Désir I felt that I could not live without you. I am a woodsman, although I have lived in towns and been to school, and how was I to get acquainted with the daughter of the notary in a proud village like yours? Such a daughter of such a ferocious notary! I had to steal you out of Bon Désir to get a chance to say this much."

For a moment Ninon Laflamme did not reply. She sat regarding him, and it was apparent that much was going on behind her eyes.

"For a poor woodsman, you have a very good dog team!" she exclaimed. "I have never seen the like of those dogs!"

"They belong to Omer Constant, who is more like a father than a friend to me."

"Yes, he encourages you to steal helpless girls when they are on their way to do their religious duties!"

"*Mademoiselle*," said Rouleau, from the deep conviction in his heart, "if you are a helpless girl, then I am a humming bird!"

She laughed, in spite of the red spots that burned in her cheeks. Suddenly she got up and walked across the room. Rouleau watched his rifle, which stood

in a corner, uneasily. All the wonderful things he had planned to say were gone from his memory. More than ever he was in love, but he was farther than ever, it seemed, from the regard of Ninon Laflamme.

"Are you going to keep me here all night?" she demanded. "Suppose I ask you to take me home now?"

"You shall be safe in your own home before morning," promised Jacques. "I would not turn back until I had had a chance to talk to you. I don't want to go at once, because my tongue seems to have lost its cunning, and I can't think of what I'd like to say; but if you can find nothing in your heart for me, I'll head the dogs south instead of north, and you shall go to your father's house in Bon Désir—I promise it."

"You have risked much!" she murmured; and it seemed to him that she was relieved at what he had just said.

"I have risked everything," he told her calmly; "but to me it is worth the risk, and more."

"What will they say of a girl who has spent the night in the bush with a young man, alone? Have you thought of that, *monsieur*?"

"You will be home before dawn," said Rouleau, suddenly miserable; "but it is true that I had not thought of what you have just said."

"You do not think very much!"

"I have thought of you until I am close to madness! How can a man think of anything else—after you?"

It is not likely that this was entirely displeasing to Ninon Laflamme. At the moment, however, her mind turned to something else. She opened the door a handbreadth and listened.

"You did not know," she said, moving away from the door, "that my father was going to vespers with me. As we started, I looked back and saw him starting out of the door of our house. It is quite certain that he is on his way here now!"

Rouleau was surprised, but by no

means disturbed, at that information.

"He could not tell where I turned from the main highway. He may have gone on to Les Grandes Bergeronnes, for all we know."

"He did not!" replied Ninon emphatically. "I crumpled leaves out of my prayer book and dropped them all the way from Bon Désir to this cabin. Look!"

She took the covers of the prayer book from the pocket of her coat. They were almost empty of leaves. Then the heart of Jacques Rouleau did, indeed, sink, for he knew that it was only a question of time before Léon Laflamme would come, and others with him, to rescue Ninon and annihilate the man who had dared to make off with the daughter of the notary.

"She called herself helpless!" muttered Jacques. "This is the worst luck I have ever had!"

"Perhaps they won't kill you," said Ninon; "but I think they'll try!"

"It is not dying that is bad luck. I shall no longer be able to see you, and the angels themselves cannot make up to me for that!"

"Angels!" she echoed. "You among the angels—"

She broke off and ran to the door. Again her head leaned to the opening. She lifted a hand for silence.

When she turned, much of the color was stricken from her face. The Ninon Laflamme who had been so bold was more than a little frightened.

"They come!" she exclaimed. "I can hear them. They are leaving their horses at the wood road, and they will be here in a very few minutes!"

Rouleau had leaped to his feet. He gazed desperately around. The dogs could not pull Ninon in the soft snow and escape pursuers on snowshoes. His own were outside the door, but she, of course, had none; nor had he any reason to believe that she would go with him if she had them.

"*Bon Dieu!*" he murmured. "It was the prayer book that finished me.

I should have known she was too quiet!"

"*Imbécile!*" cried Ninon. "Put on your snowshoes and go!"

"Without you? Without the dogs of my friend Omer? Never!"

"Me and dogs!" she stormed. "Are we of the same importance?"

Now, however foolish and helpless Jacques Rouleau might have felt himself to be during the past half hour, he was neither foolish nor helpless in time of danger. In searching the cabin for some hint of a way out of the situation, he noted that the room, for greater warmth, had been covered with a ceiling of close-set poles at the level of the eaves. There was, then, a kind of loft overhead, and he judged that the poles were strong enough to support the weight of an ordinary man.

He leaped to a bunk at one end of the room, and, reaching up, parted the poles easily. It was the work of a moment to make a small opening.

"If you will," he said to the girl, who was watching him curiously, "you can help me. Get up here and keep quiet. I'll take you home later. They'll never think to look for you between the roof and these poles!"

She gazed at him with speculative eyes, while he waited. Then, slowly, she came across the room, waving aside the hand he held out to help her.

"After all, I do not want my father to get into trouble for killing you," she said. "Never mind helping me, *mon-sieur!* I can get up there alone. Go out and quiet your precious dogs, or they will be shot!"

She sprang lightly to the bunk as Rouleau turned and hurried out of doors, for already the dogs had set up a great clamor. In the moonlight he saw a group of dark figures coming through the maples. Because of the dogs, the men halted at a respectful distance, but he saw that they were armed with rifles. There were three, and one towering form Jacques recognized as that of Léon Laflamme. They

waited until he drove the dogs back to the shed.

"We'll shoot if you try to get away!" boomed Laflamme, in a voice of thunder. "Go into the cabin there ahead of us!"

Rouleau was careful to show himself plainly as he walked back to the cabin door. The room appeared to be empty when he entered, and he noted, with a pang, that Ninon had taken his rifle with her into the loft. She was evidently taking no chances that her father might get hurt.

A clatter of snowshoes outside; then the pursuers came stamping into the little *cabane à sucre*. If Léon Laflamme had appeared ferocious when Jacques saw him in Bon Désir, he was now a dragon breathing fire and smoke.

"Where is my daughter?" he roared. "What have you done with her?"

"Your daughter, *monsieur*?" asked Jacques. "Have you lost one?"

"He laughs at us!" cried one of Laflamme's companions—a young man whose eyes were much too close together, and whose finger caressed the trigger of his rifle impatiently. "Put his feet into the fire—that will brighten his memory!"

"Do you hear what M. Alphonse Leclerc says?" bellowed the notary. "He had asked for the hand of my daughter! He would have married her but for this night!"

"Then," barked Jacques, throwing discretion to the winds in his anger, "this night is fortunate for *mademoiselle*!"

"Get him, Leclerc!" cried Laflamme, advancing. "We'll toast his feet for him!"

IV

THEY moved forward all together, spreading out—three men with rifles. Leclerc was able-bodied, Laflamme was a giant, and the third man was broad and solid. Rouleau snatched up the

long iron poker and retreated. A guarded whisper reached him.

"*Imbécile!* Come up here!"

At least that might prolong the battle, and she had a rifle with her. Hurling the poker at the head of Leclerc, who was nearest, Jacques leaped to the bunk and swung himself up into the loft. Ninon's breath was upon his cheek; her fingers clutched his arm.

"That's where he's hidden her!" roared Léon Laflamme. "Come on! We'll get him!"

"Look!" whispered Ninon.

"*Dieu merci!*" breathed Jacques.

Before him a big hole gaped in the bark roof. The girl was pulling him toward it. She thrust the rifle into his hands.

"I made that hole with the rifle butt as soon as they came inside," she panted. "Jump!"

From the bunk below came grunts and the sound of scrambling as Laflamme tried to pull his big body up into the loft. Jacques vaulted through the roof and dropped into the soft snow. Ninon was beside him when he struck, and she ran beside him as he made for the shed, where the dogs, feeling the presence of danger, had begun to mill around. Rouleau gathered up the three pairs of snowshoes that were upended beside the cabin door and flung them upon the toboggan. He slipped his toes into the loops of his own.

From within the cabin came the crashing of poles and the thud of a heavy fall. The noise of Léon Laflamme's wrath spilled out from every crevice.

"Poor papa!" exclaimed Mlle. Laflamme. "He is a very violent man!"

"Ninon," said Jacques, "will you let me take you home?"

"Ah!" she exclaimed, and seated herself on the toboggan. "*Allons!*"

"*Marche, Minée!*" cried Jacques.

He did not care now whether those within the cabin heard, for it would take them a long time to struggle to

the wood road without snowshoes. The dogs pulled, leaping into the bush.

At the wood road Rouleau found a horse, well blanketed and tied to a tree. It was harnessed to the magnificent high-backed *traineau* of M. Laflamme—a sleigh shining with paint and filled with robes. The harness was plumed, and an arch of bells rose above the collar. At the sight of these riches Jacques Rouleau sighed profoundly.

"You can take your father's horse and drive home," he said. "As for those roasters of feet, it will not hurt them to walk. It will, in fact, cool them off a little!"

"I prefer to travel as I came, thank you," replied Ninon coldly; "but we'll unhitch the horse and turn him around. He knows the way home. I shall enjoy the thought of Alphonse Leclerc walking back to Bon Désir!"

"No doubt it will help to make him a more docile husband," remarked Jacques, as he headed Léon Laflamme's horse in the direction whence he had come. Ninon flung the snowshoes of their pursuers into the *traineau*.

"I do not want a docile husband!" she snapped. "I do not want that gimlet-eyed Leclerc at any price!"

"Ah!" breathed Jacques.

"Yes?" from Mlle. Laflamme.

"We have time enough," he said slowly, as he watched horse and *traineau* on their chiming progress toward Bon Désir. "It is not far."

"It is a long way to the Lac des Sables!"

"Ah, yes, but I shall not care how long it takes me after I say good-by to you!"

"*Bon Dieu!*" she cried. Suddenly reaching up, she snatched the lead rope from his hand. "*Marche, Minée! Allons! Vite! Vite!*"

For a moment of paralyzed astonishment Jacques Rouleau stood still and watched the dogs head north on the long trail to the Lac des Sables. This time they had obeyed the voice of Ninon Laflamme without hesitation.

He began to run, and came panting up beside the toboggan.

"Ninon!" he cried. "Ninon!"

"I am going to return the valuable dogs of your friend," she said, flinging the rope up to Jacques. "*Imbécile!* No, do not stop now! When we arrive at the home of my chaperon, Omer Constant, we will discuss many things!"

The sun was lifting above the mountains like a mighty rose when Minée, her whiskers white with frost, headed down from the bush toward the white expanse of the Lac des Sables. She and the others gave tongue joyously. Already smoke was rising comfortably from the chimney of Constant's *cabane*.

"*Bonjour, la maison!*" shouted Rouleau.

With a flourish, the dogs and the toboggan drew up before the door of the cabin. It opened, and old Omer's red nightcap appeared.

"*Bonjour, M. Constant!*" cried a voice more charming than any that the Lac des Sables had heard in many moons. Ninon Laflamme sprang up from the bearskins. "We have brought back your dogs. *Merci, monsieur!*"

"*Saccagé chien!*" gasped Omer. He stared, and rubbed his nose, and stared again. "Jacques, my son, I thought you were mad; but now that I see her—come in and eat soup with me!"

Then Jacques, while the back of Omer was turned, drew Ninon to him and kissed her for the first time. He grew drunk with the light that came into her eyes.

"I love you so much that I love even your father!" he said. "As soon as we are married, I will send word to him that you are safe."

"Oh, he knows that!" exclaimed Ninon. "I sent back what was left of my prayer book in the *traineau*, and I wrote on a blank leaf, 'The young man thinks he is taking me home, but I have decided to elope with him!'"



“Send Haggerty!”

It Took a World War to Teach a Well Meaning Money Lender the Right Perspective on a Particular Loan

By Frank R. Adams



GEORGE HAGGERTY was handicapped by the cold magnificence of the bank directors' room. If the interview could have taken place in his own garage office, unheated and disorderly though it was, he would have been able to talk more convincingly.

As it was he was acutely conscious of his smallness, of the fact that his hair would not stay parted even though he had had it barbered especially for this occasion, and smelled like it, and that there were several dark spots on his best suit that simply would not come off even with high test gasoline.

So, when he went out, after explaining in a frightened voice why he needed the ten thousand dollars, he felt that he might just as well have spent the

morning putting that new differential pinion in Doc Hayward's coupé, even though he knew perfectly well that Doc would probably not be able to pay for it until after Christmas.

The bank directors were pretty much of the same mind as they sat in smug conclave around the great mahogany table and lit fresh cigars.

Still, Haggerty's proposition had to be considered and disposed of, if merely as a matter of routine.

"How much of a mortgage are we already carrying on Haggerty's place?" Thomas McCoy asked as a matter of form, patting his fifty-year-old tummy which had got that way through two decades as president of the McCoy Iron Works.

"Three thousand," replied Radcliff, second vice president of the bank. As



HE HAD NEVER EXPECTED TO HEAR A COMRADE'S VOICE AGAIN

general supervisor of the loan department he had all the data in his head. "We've also got seven hundred and fifty on that old shack he's living in."

"Which is all that it's worth," contributed Nelson Walters, the oldest director. He was conservative, old Walters was, and he based his ideas of values on what they were forty years ago—not a bad fault in a banker. He had made his fortune back in the lumber days, and had never quite tuned in on the possibilities of modern manufacturing ideas.

"Merely as a matter of form, what do you think of it yourself, Walter?" McCoy addressed Radcliff directly this time. "You're a good friend to Haggerty, and probably understand better than any of us exactly what sort of a man he is.

"Leaving out all consideration of the practicality of this idea of his for manufacturing his automatic emergency brake right here in Havenswood, is there any probability that he has the stuff in him to put a proposition like that through, even if all the conditions were favorable?"

Walter Radcliff smiled. He had known all along that they would put the actual decision up to him. Although some of these men were twice his own age he knew that he had, and merited, a reputation for hard-headed business sense that was a very considerable asset to this bank.

They knew, too, that he would put his well-shod foot down on this project of little George Haggerty's just as he had so frequently done before on every proposition of less than government

bond security that had ever come before them.

Walter was hard boiled, and everybody knew it, including himself. Some of his fellow townsmen had said with feeling rancor that he wouldn't lend a nickel to his grandmother without her best set of false teeth for security. Walter had heard that without getting sore about it.

Well, what if it was true? He had something to prove that he was right. He was an official in the village bank, he had a nice home all paid for, a wife who dressed better than any other woman in town, and a rapidly growing stack of gilt-edge bonds in his safe-deposit box. And he was not yet thirty-five.

All in all, the material benefits set off very nicely the fact that his waist measure was exactly the same as that of his chest, that he was not very popular with the poker playing set, and that his wife had lately looked at him with eyes that seemed to be seeking some one who was not there.

Well, she'd get over that and settle down soon herself into the realization that a provider is better than a play-fellow any day in the week.

So he raised his forefinger as he began to talk, a favorite gesture of his to emphasize his remarks.

"Gentlemen," he said, "George Haggerty is very well known to me. We were boys together in this village. We went to school together, we used to swim the river together, we ran away together once; we were in the same company of infantry in the army. Yes, I think I know his characteristics better than any of the rest of you.

"And the principal characteristic, the one which has the most bearing on this loan which he has asked us to make, is his recklessness. George Haggerty is, I believe, the most reckless man alive. This is easily evidenced by the life he is leading now.

"He owes every merchant in town, and yet his boy has been allowed to

experiment with expensive materials until he has made a better radio receiving set than any one of us owns. Haggerty cannot hold an agency for the sale of any brand of automobiles because he can't keep enough money on hand to finance his used-car sales; and his wife drives a smart roadster and dresses almost as well as mine.

"He is unable to pay the interest on his loans at the bank, but in spite of that he and his wife went to Chicago last winter to see all the latest plays." Radcliff paused effectively, then continued:

"All that is in the present. But to go back we find that to-day is only history repeating itself. As a boy he gambled with cards and dice, always took the long end of any chance that offered, and if it hadn't been for his friends, would have been a tramp long ago.

"On his credit side it may be said that he is a very handy man around machinery. He has always been able to fix almost anything that was out of order, from the projection mechanism in the local motion picture theater to the complicated secret wiring of the burglar alarm system out at the tire factory.

"He is a natural-born trouble-shooter, and he can perform feats of magic with no more equipment than a piece of baling wire. You have doubtless heard him called 'Haywire Haggerty.' I'll bet he has a small coil of it in his pocket right now, and a pair of ten-inch pliers on the other side to balance the weight.

"But whether the natural abilities of a handy man are enough foundation for this bank to risk so large a sum of money is something different. Gentlemen, I regret," he raised his finger impressively like an emperor making a decision in a gladiatorial arena—"I regret that I must recommend that—"

His finger was halfway down. That was where it stayed for what seemed to Walter Radcliff like at least half an

hour. His voice died away, too, the paneled walls of the directors' room faded from view, the chairs and tables vanished, so did the men, Walter Radcliff himself was somewhere else—away.

II

THE chin strap of his steel helmet irritated his skin, and drove the two days' stubble back into his sweating flesh.

A replica of the enemy trenches was laid out back of the lines and his platoon was rehearsing a raid. The chief objective was a concrete pill box that housed a troublesome machine gun which had proved invulnerable to all available artillery fire.

They had gone through the motions of following an imaginary barrage up to the sketched out German first line, and holding it while a detail entered the concrete gun emplacement from the rear and blew it up with special high explosive bombs prepared for the occasion.

It was hot and dusty, had been for a week. All tradition to the contrary, some of you fellows will remember that week in France.

"That will be all for this morning, men," Radcliff told his outfit. "Everything seems to be all right. Go and get chow and then grab off some sleep. We'll try it to-night with the full orchestra."

He had just returned from the officers' school at Langres. But his newly awarded gold bars were not on his shoulders. Neither did he wear the Sam Brown belt he was entitled to. As an officer commanding a raiding party he dressed the same as his men. He felt more natural that way; he had so recently been one of them.

Private Haggerty threw himself down on the grass near Lieutenant Radcliff. Haggerty looked as little like a soldier as it was possible for any man who wore a uniform. That uniform was too big for him, and the man

inside of it was shy and apologetic. There were grease stains on the breeches, and a button or two missing from the blouse.

He searched his pockets hopefully, but without results, unless you counted a pair of pliers, a few loose bolts, and a small coil of wire. These he restored to their hiding places and began to chew a piece of grass.

Radcliff laughed. "Here's a cigarette, George. You must have left yours at home on the grand piano."

George took one sheepishly. "I ain't had any since a couple of days ago, Walt—I mean, lieutenant."

"Somebody cleaned you?"

"Uh-huh. I only had a couple of francs, anyhow. They might have been counterfeit, too."

They smoked in silence a minute or two.

"Heard from home lately?" Walter asked casually.

"Yes. Mamie sent her regards to you. She's hittin' on all six, she says, and is lookin' for us to get back for Christmas dinner. The President promised that, she says. It's funny the way a woman believes most anything a man tells 'em—even a sailor."

George hesitated a moment as if he had something else to say, but he finished his cigarette before he finally decided to spill it.

"There was a note in with Mamie's letter from Estelle Corbin, too."

"From Estelle?" Radcliff sat up. What could Estelle be writing to George about?

"It wasn't much," George hastily explained. "Just a fool thing about I should look after you—she didn't know you was an officer, you see. But I thought I ought to tell you, maybe, because—we so as—well, we didn't use to have many secrets from each other."

Walter laughed. "She certainly picked out a hot guardian. I've spent most of my life digging you out of trouble that you got into over your ears because you haven't got sense

enough not to take a chance."

"I know it. I thought you'd laugh. I guess she didn't know about that time you pulled me out of the river when I got cramps down at Smith's dam. I guess nobody much knows about that but you and me, because we couldn't tell on account of the whalin' I would have got if dad had found out.

"That's funny. It's funny to be here in this darn country talkin' about swimming and American girls and, oh, well, everything is so different."

"Lieutenant Radcliff."

An orderly stood looking from one man to the other to see which would answer the salute.

Radcliff got up.

"Captain Marshfield says to send Private Haggerty to company headquarters at once, sir. There's something wrong with the switchboard and the signal corps repairman attached to us got killed this morning out fixing some lines."

"All right. This is Private Haggerty. You might as well go along with this messenger, George. But I hope to God you can get through with whatever they want and get back to us before we start on this party."

"I guess I can. It probably is something I can fix up with a little hay wire and a—"

Walter laughed. "That's what you get for being so damned handy. I might just as well not have you in my platoon. Anytime anything goes wrong, from a jammed machine gun down to a loose screw on the skipper's manicure scissors, they send for you."

George forgot to salute until after he had noticed the messenger's snappy right arm. Then he grinned as he did it. "I'll see you later."

But it must have been a more baffling problem than George had anticipated. He was not back with the outfit even when they assembled at the jump off. Walter rather anxiously looked for him while the artillery laid down a barrage along a battalion front.

The extent of the fire was intended to deceive the enemy as to the exact point where the raiding party would strike. But it would have been a very dull foe indeed who would not have suspected that that annoying machine gun strong point was what the American army wanted for breakfast.

"Let's go!" Walter shouted, and signaled when the barrage took its first giant stride forward.

And, as if born from a far flung handful of dragon's teeth, they appeared suddenly upright upon the earth and began to march slowly forward.

It was worse than Radcliff had expected. Perhaps the staff officer in his château back there had been too sanguine in his belief that the Germans would not instantly surmise the significance of the disturbance.

At any rate machine gun fire from the objective of the American raid very nearly wiped out the entire party, in spite of the fact that they had divided into groups in order to make a flanking approach from both sides at once. And the German artillery, awakened to excited barking, was also turning over the ground which the American barrage had just plowed.

Radcliff found himself in back of the pill box accompanied by a telephone corporal who had been methodically unreeling the spider line of their connection to headquarters.

A dozen other shadowy shapes loomed up through the smoke. That was all there was.

No use to attempt to hold the German front line trench even if they could take it. There weren't enough of them left. But they might blow up the strong point and, after all, that was what they had come to do.

Walter tried to find the men who had the special bombs. They had white brassards on their arms, and the others had been instructed to keep away from them.

Walter never located them, but the enemy did, with a stray machine gun

bullet. There was only a hole where the entire remnant of Walter's command had stood.

Walter himself and his shadow, the telephone corporal, were blown against the entrance to the machine gun emplacement, which was shattered by the explosion.

Walter did not know whether he was hurt or not. All he was conscious of was that he was on his feet and inside; that before him stood the pot-helmeted crews of the guns, their hands in the air, and shouting "*Kamerad!*"

Walter might have laughed if he had thought of it. But his brain was too busy with subconscious ideas of self-preservation. With his automatic sweeping the inside of the fortified room he motioned with his other hand for the prisoners to step outside.

They filed past him at the door docilely enough, and he followed them out and headed them for the American lines, hands still in the air. Whether they would ever arrive was no concern of his for the moment.

He looked around for help. There was none.

So he reëntered the concrete dugout, threw up a few sandbags that were lying about across the entrance, and moved one of the German machine guns over to a position where it commanded the enemy's first line. There was quite a lot of ammunition.

That done, he turned his attention to his telephone corporal. He was dead, with the field telephone in his hand.

"Not so good," Walter muttered.

The artillery disturbance was dying down. It was getting light outside, too. Walter peeped over his improvised parapet. He was on slightly higher ground than the trenches, and could see helmets and bayonets moving about.

Instinctively he turned to the machine gun and pulled the trigger mechanism.

Nothing happened.

He turned around to look for tools. A telephone buzzer on the wall was humming frantically, and a light flashed. He picked up the receiver, and was about to say "Hello," when a guttural voice began to damn him in fluent German.

Walter could not reply. For he knew instantly that the Germans did not know yet that their garrison had been evacuated as prisoners. Thank God, the dunderheads had not gone back to their own lines!

And it would not do to hang up either. That would only cause an investigation.

So he fired a bullet point-blank into the mouthpiece. That would jar an ear off of that irritated Heinie, and at the same time make him think that the line had been destroyed by a shell.

Of course a repairman might be sent out to fix it, but at least he had a few minutes' time.

Walter went back to the unfamiliar machine gun. Before its intricacies he was helpless. And the other piece was out of commission from a stray shell fragment which had broken the barrel.

Walter smoked a cigarette. He had ten cigarettes, and about twenty rounds of ammunition for his automatic. He wondered which would be used up first.

III

His eye fell on the body of the telephone corporal. Perhaps he had an automatic, too—at least cigarettes and a canteen.

As he bent over the dead soldier the field telephone almost dropped into his hands. What if it should happen to be still connected with company headquarters?

It was a French instrument of the one piece type.

Walter twisted the generator handle and held the hook to his mouth and ear.

He could almost have cried when a voice in English said "Hello."

But instead he steadied himself.

"This is Lieutenant Radcliff. If Captain Marshfield is there, perhaps I'd better talk to him."

"I can't hear you very well, lieutenant. This switchboard has been out of order all day, but I'll put you on to the captain. Maybe he can hear you."

"Hello!" said the captain. "Who's this?"

"Lieutenant Radcliff."

"Can't hear you." Walter heard him perfectly, though. "What the hell's the matter with this damn thing? Private Haggerty, try to hold this connection decent for a minute. This may be important."

Private Haggerty did, or somebody did, because in a few minutes the connection was working better, and as briefly as possible Walter outlined the situation, concluding with:

"If I could only get this machine gun to working I could hold the position indefinitely, I think."

"But how the hell can I tell you how to work a German machine gun over the telephone, even if I knew how to do it?"

"Can't you send somebody who could dope it out? Send Haggerty! He could—"

That was all. The wire failed somewhere along the line. The captain tried again and again to get in communication with his junior officer, but without result.

He turned to Lieutenant Ruggles, who had just crawled out of his bunk to relieve his superior. "Radcliff is out there alone in that German pill box with a machine gun that won't work. He wants us to send Haggerty to him to fix it. But nobody could get there alive. It's nearly daylight now, and—Private Haggerty, where are you?"

Captain Marshfield had noticed for the first time that that untidy little soldier was no longer there.

"Somebody go get that damn fool. He might be nutty enough to try it."

Private Haggerty was.

Already he was at the parapet where the raiding party had jumped off only an hour before. A sentry on the firing step stopped him as he started to crawl over.

"You can't do that," protested the soldier.

"Who's going to stop me?"

"Me and the German army."

George turned on him savagely.

"Then you better go get your pals, because you can't do it alone. Just try it."

The soldier did not seem to know just what to do. No use to shoot at George, who was now a rifle's length away. The Heinies would attend to that in their own manner as soon as they saw him, anyway.

So he bit off a chew of tobacco and watched George's imitation of a snake trying to keep a date before sunrise without being caught at it. A morning mist helped some, but it was being shredded by a gentle breeze that was growing momentarily stronger. Finally George disappeared from sight.

"Of all the damned fools!"

IV

WALTER RADCLIFF was still fumbling with the machine gun when he saw a working party leave the German trench and start in his direction. The mist hid them somewhat, but they were against the glow of dawn, and more easily discernible for that reason. And they were coming his way all right.

Walter waited until they were within pistol range and opened fire with his automatic.

Two men fell and the others retired hastily.

But his secret was out. He wondered how many minutes or seconds it would be before hell would be let loose against him. Not longer than it would take to relay the information to the headquarters of the troops holding that sector, he imagined.

He had half a dozen cigarettes left, too. More than he could possibly need

during all the rest of his life. So he lit one recklessly.

And another one after that.

Then the riot began.

G. I. cans, trench mortars, hand grenades, gas, machine guns, everything on the entire menu, from soup to cover charge.

Lieutenant Radcliff was idly sitting on the floor of the shelter, wondering whether he would be blown up, shot, or bayoneted, when a voice in back of him, where he did not expect to hear a voice, speaking English, which he had never hoped to hear again, said:

"Lady, was it you sent for somebody to repair your vacuum cleaner? If it was, can you move one of these sandbags a little so I can crawl in out of the wet?"

Walter did, and dragged him in.

"Zowie. You will go off without me," Haggerty reproached him. "Where is this contraption that won't work? Let me get started on it before—"

"But, George, they got you."

"Did they? Sure enough. It's in the leg, though, and I can sit down to this job."

He dragged himself over to the gun, and with clever, probing fingers began experimenting with its mechanism. Walter, knowing that he was useless as an assistant, cut off the left leg of George's breeches and applied a tourniquet above the ghastly hole he found there. By stopping the bleeding he might be able to keep George alive for a few hours.

"*Tap-tap-tap, tappety-tap.*"

"There she goes!" declared George exultantly. "Look, Walter, here's the trick of it." He showed Radcliff the way to operate the machine gun. "Gee, we've got a bunch of ammunition, too. Now, if you can handle it, I'd better rest a spell. I feel kind of tired somehow."

And he looked it. Walter gave him some water, and fixed him up as comfortably as possible. Then he went on

watch. By noon he had repulsed two tentative raids, and in the afternoon there was one considerable attack, and by that time, also, George was nearly gone. Walter gave him all the cigarettes.

There was another demonstration late in the afternoon along the German front line, and Walter fired his last round before it subsided.

Then he sat down beside George. There was nothing to do but wait.

The fact that they were both alive to tell about it the next day was not due to any last minute rescue by the Marines. They were First Division men, anyway, and would doubtless have refused to be saved by the Leathernecks.

No, Lieutenant Radcliff and Private Haggerty were restored to citizenship merely by the fact that a brass hat somewhere in the rear decided that the American front would advance four or five kilometers that night, and gave orders accordingly. He hadn't even met the new Lieutenant Radcliff, and would not have seen Private Haggerty unless he had stepped on him.

But the line of pins on the map moved east, and sometime during the night the machine gun emplacement became the temporary property of Uncle Sam, who promptly turned it into a surgical dressing station. That was very fortunate for Private Haggerty, who could never have been vulcanized if they had been obliged to move him.

Second Vice President Walter Radcliff looked curiously at his finger, which was still in mid-air, just where he had left it in charge of his subconscious ego while his mind went winging back. Apparently he had only been gone a second, for his voice was still saying: "I regret that I must recommend—"

What was he talking about? Oh, yes, about a ten-thousand-dollar loan to George Haggerty to establish him

in the manufacture of his automatic emergency brake. And what he was about to recommend was that the bank should refuse the loan. Business was business.

"I regret that I must recommend that the bank should not commit its funds to an enterprise fostered by a man of George Haggerty's character. He is altogether too reckless of consequences for a borrower of bank resources."

Those were the right words. Any

banker would say that was a sound, hard-headed, business policy. And yet to the speaker, after he had uttered them, they seemed like a slap in the face of a man grinning in through a shell-torn embrasure and bringing to a fellow Yank life and hope.

To hell with being hard boiled!

"I advise the rejection of the loan by the bank," Walter Radcliff said judicially, "because I am going to make it myself from my own private resources."

CALL OF THE WILE!

THEY are flooding us with folders
From the far-flung open spaces,
Where the overhanging boulders
Boldly grace the outdoor places.

Ah, the phrases they are choosing
To allure and tempt and wile us,
Penned by authors who are using
All their word gifts to beguile us!

With prolific propaganda
They extol the woodland wonders;
The hotels-à-la-veranda,
Out where Nature made no blunders;

Where the lambs are blissful bleaters,
And the lowly kine are lowing,
And there are no starving 'skeeters,
Where the sylvan streams are flowing!

They exude anent the mountains,
Rills and rivulets and rivers,
And the springs—youth-giving fountains,
That renew lymphatic livers!

In poetic, purling phrases,
They describe the soaring splendors
Of Old Sol, in all his phases,
As he beams on pale week-enders!

Aye, they trill of fish with speckles,
And of swishy, fish-line twitchings,
But they speak not of the freckles,
Or the poison ivy itchings.

Nor do they bedamp our yearnings,
In symphonic, singing phrases,
With the mention of sunburnings—
That will blister us like blazes!

James Edward Hungerford

HE WAS YOUNG AND FOOL-
ISH, BUT LUCK WAS HIS



Beauty

*The Story of a Youth Who Did Not Know the Prospector's Adage—
"Gold Is Where You Find It!"*

By Brooke Hanlon



HE Edwards family were all served when Lucia Peyton edged in quietly. She was like a whisper in the busy dinner group. White-skinned, with delicate features, and vaguely shadowed big eyes, she was "Lily Peyton's girl."

Vinny Edwards got long-sufferingly to his feet again, a slight twist of amusement at one side of his mouth. Even when annoyed he was a good-looking youth.

Look at her there, he thought, perched like a bird about to fly away! Afraid of her shadow, she was. You'd have thought she'd know better than to stay on with the family, even though

his mother had taken her in, even though the girls did whisper and giggle to her, offer to lend her their dresses, take her to the movies with them.

You'd have thought, really, that her stepmother had been—all right, down there by the fishery, before she'd died. "Lily Peyton's girl," you could read disparagingly in Vinny's eyes. Notorious Lily Peyton, from down in that section where mended and pitched and slimy nets were spread out over the fields like huge cobwebs, smelling in the sun.

Lily Peyton had been the washer-woman for the Edwards family. Vinny's mother had had to go down there and take Lily's stepdaughter out of that squalor, after Lily's death. She'd

had to do this just in the middle of the season when Vinny had been able, after long years of trying, to hang on to Verde Lake's crowd through the summer, too. The coming of Yale and Princeton boys and the opening of summer homes along Radnor Road hadn't ousted him this year.

He slid easily into his seat again. He was tall, slim, cool, and blond. He filled in with Verde Lake's crowd, and most of his invitations were last minute ones.

"Greenlawns must be wonderful inside," Alice ventured. She'd waited in vain for Vin to bring up the momentous subject, but, perversely, he would not.

"Oh, it is," Lucia broke in with soft breathlessness. "There's a room that's all silver, and they haven't paper on the walls, but painting, and—" She stopped. Vinny was looking at her with his eyebrows up.

"Why, Lucia—" It was Alice. "How did you know?"

"My stepmother—" Slow color crept up in Lucia's cheeks. "She—she worked there sometimes."

"Gerald, did you polish the car?" Vinny inquired carefully. His eyes peered coolly over Lucia's head.

"Yes, I did," Gerald growled. "I sweated and sweated out there all morning, if you want to know. The car's ready, your highness. Here, Lucia." His wide, pale, twelve-year-old eyes were on her bent head. "Eat my peach tart, too. I d'want it."

"He means he perspired, I guess." Alice laughed lightly. "Do you want our car to go to Greenlawns unpolished?" she inquired.

"He's sick, I guess." Florence's laugh tinkled, too. "He doesn't want his peach tart!"

"I do, too." Gerald, driven, was on his feet. "I do want my tart, but I can't eat it. I can't eat around here because—because some things around here make me sick, so they do. I can't eat my peach tart"—his face went

from pink to red—"because some things around here make me so sick I can't eat, that's what they do, and one of them is I have to sweat and sweat all morning."

"Perspire, dear."

"Sweat all morning so's the car can be polished for the Prince of Wales, so's the Prince of Wales can go to Greenlawns. That's the kinda things make me sick." His voice rose higher. "The Prince of Wales makes me sick, and him having to have a new tire so bad—"

"Oh, Gerald, hush!"

"—So bad I have to take Florence's dress back to Morgan and Mullen's and say she don't want it when she does. That's the kinda things—"

"Gerald!"

"—Make me sick; and mother saying she'll do the washing next week so's the Prince of Wales can have his tux cleaned for two dollars and seventy-fi' cents, and I have to go all the way down to Burket's for it after I sweated and sweated all morning polishing his car. That's the kinda things make me so sick I can't—"

"Mother!" Vinny appealed.

"Gerald, Gerald!"

"—Eat my peach tart, if you want to know," Gerald finished determinedly. The side porch screen closed explosively behind him.

"Mother"—Vinny was on his feet, too—"do we have to put up with this shouting?" he inquired levelly. "Do we?" His lips were pressed firmly together, and his eyes were hurt. He walked out into the hall.

His mother followed him. "Don't mind, Vinny."

"It's just"—he disregarded her hands on his shoulders—"a week-end spoiled."

"You'll go, won't you?" she pressed anxiously. "I'll have to punish him, I'm afraid."

"Oh, Vin!" Florence followed, too. "I didn't want the dress; truly I didn't. My Heavens, if you could've

seen the way it hung! Nobody would have had it. You'll go, Vinny, won't you?"

"Oh, I'll go." He put them aside patiently. "I can't get out of it now."

Back in the dining room Alice tapped nervously with a spoon and watched the group in the hall. "How Gerald can—" Her murmur was mystified. "Imagine our Vin rating a week-end at Greenlawns." Her voice was hushed.

"It's a party for old Glendenning's niece. Her name's Loris Kayne: I read it in the *Gazette*. First thing we know he'll be getting a card to the Governor's ball." Her eyes rounded and gleamed.

Lily Peyton's girl raised her head slowly, but said nothing.

II

VINNY'S week-end wasn't spoiled. On the contrary it was one of the most successful of the summer. Loris Kayne was an illustration from a book of modern fairy tales. She was the princess on the throne.

The consciousness that his car, though of a foreign make, was a ten-year-old model only set Vinny's blond head a little higher when he turned toward Radnor Road that afternoon.

He'd been careful to call for just the right people. Verde Lake's russet head bobbed beside him, for instance, and Verde Lake's sister Miriam had married old Glendenning of Greenlawns. He shifted gears for the slight elevation that was Bleeker Hill, and hoped Verde wouldn't notice that he'd had to do it. The Rincé swung into Radnor Road. It made a lot of noise.

The Lakes were high in the social system of the shore colony, and when Miriam had landed the millionaire Glendenning—

"Loris Kayne's been abroad ages," Verde called clearly as they turned into the drive. One had to carry on even the most casual of conversations in rather a high key when traveling in

Vinny's car. "Perhaps she'll ritz us." Verde chuckled to herself.

Vinny slouched still further over his wheel. Verde Lake could laugh: no one would ever ritz her.

They were at Greenlawns then. He was offering cigarettes nonchalantly to the boys who had been prep and were now Princeton and Yale, was drinking in the loveliness that was all about him.

Vinny had an eye for beauty. There had always been so much about Belmeer and the shore colonies that was more beautiful than anything he had been able to afford. The landscaped gardens of the homes in Bleeker Place—he had loved to walk past them even as a schoolboy.

Sometimes after the season was over and the big places on Radnor Road had been closed up, he had wandered in and taken the beauty of their gardens for his own—the soft-colored stones in the Bellows' place court, the strange flowers and shrubs in the Green and Seaman sunken gardens.

Shorefarms—Green Hill—Sungirt—their very names had been music in his ears. Then, when in high school, he had worked for a French baker and had had to deliver bread and rolls and fancy cakes at the service entrances of these same homes.

All Vinny had was chiseled features. His personal beauty was authentic, and as he had grown taller and slimmer, and put on the accepted flannels and plus fours of the shore colony, the girls belonging to some of the wealthy, all-year-round families had opened their homes to him—Verde Lake among them. In winter, personable escorts were scarce.

Vinny was now commuting to a position as draftsman in the city, and had bought his Rincé. A 1916 model, but a Rincé nevertheless.

This year he'd held on through the summer. It was late August, and he was week-ending at Greenlawns. The invitation had created a stir in Alice's and Florence's hearts, because Green-

lawns meant money. It was important to Vinny, because it brought him near beauty.

With these people, the least detail of their lives was beautiful. Even their meals were ordered, impressive rituals. Vinny frowned, thinking of home.

He lay at Loris Kayne's feet and watched the others in the pool. The heiress had attached him to her side with a quick and imperious preference. New girls always showed that same swift preference for Vinny.

He could be cool about it, posing among cushions and dogs, and glancing carefully up at her from time to time. A gossamer white sweater with white fur was close at her throat and wrists. Her amber cigarette holder dangled between listless fingers, and Vinny had to keep getting up to give her a light.

He pulled the ears of the silky little dogs, and wished he knew their exact family. To drop something knowing about them would have been effective. But there was always the danger of making a mistake; so he petted them in silence and resolved to look up dogs. He was continually resolving to look up things, and doing it.

She branched out into haphazard confidences. Her father and mother wanted to put her safely away in London for the winter, with a cousin, but she was hoping for an invitation to extend her stay here at Greenlawns. Did he wish her luck?

Did he?

The confidences went on. There came a time when he could gracefully introduce a French phrase, and he did so, watching her, waiting for her comment. People always remarked about his accent. He'd taken French four years in high school, and had kept his ears open and his tongue busy, working for the baker.

Her comment came. "You've been to France." It was indifferent.

"Well, no," he admitted. "My father's dead, you see. My mother

doesn't like—that is, I haven't traveled as much as I'd have liked."

"You'll find your French a big help when you go," she said idly. It was as though he might be going any moment now. Europe was part of Vinny's dream of beauty.

He looked gravely out over the velvetlike lawns. Many late flowers were in bloom, and the slight breeze cast up intermittent waves of perfume, intoxicating him. He saw sun-dappled greens, and delicately curled leaves floating in a white marble framed pool, and scarlet flowers ranged along its rim. With eyes half shut he fondled the silky dogs.

"When you go to France!" The scene shifted then, and he was at the table at home suddenly. "When you go to France, your highness," Gerald's shrill voice jeered.

Suddenly Vinny's eyes flew open and he turned one of the little dogs over impatiently.

"How old are you?" He'd come back from his excursion with a fresh thought.

"Nineteen."

"Nineteen! I can't believe it." He looked at her wonderingly. "I know a girl who's nineteen, too. She's a— a baby, that's all. Some one has to look after her. Has to, that's all. I can't believe you're nineteen, too."

"What's her name?" Loris feigned interest.

"Lucia."

"Is she pretty?" Loris opened an amber vanity case and studied her own sleek head, its pale gold wave capped close about it. It was as though she said: "Is she pretty, too?"

"No," Vinny said, slowly, and immediately knew that he had lied. Lucia Peyton's little white nose, delicately turned lips, and dusky eyes came up before him. "No," he repeated.

The party moved graciously on. Vinny might have been found studying Miriam's collection of rare old glass, fingering the inlay in an ex-

quisite piece of furniture, studying a painting with frowning eyes. He knew a little bit about glass and furniture; painting he must look up.

He might have been found studying the owner of all this magnificence, too. He could remember her as Miriam Lake, of course. Well, she was in luck, all right. As a Lake she had had beautiful things, of course, but at twenty-eight—and not particularly attractive—to have captured old Glendenning!

A girl could do that, Vinny mused. A girl could step out of her circle. Dancing with Loris, he watched Miriam. The step from the Lakes' circle into old Glendenning's was almost as high and as difficult a step as that from the Edwardses' to the Lakes, wasn't it?

Vinny's eyes dropped to his cigarette. His good-looking face, that unmistakable look of royalty about it, was enigmatic. A girl could do that sort of thing, and surround herself with beauty. But a man—

"Vinny," Peg Whitten was moved to call just then. "Lucia Peyton's at your place now, isn't she?"

"Yes."

"I always did think it was a shame about her." Peg laughed queerly, he thought.

"A charity of mother's," he explained carelessly to Loris, and the subject was dropped then. A slight frown had etched its way across Vinny's forehead, however.

Lucia Peyton again! It seemed almost a deliberate effort on the family's part to make things harder for him, taking her in. Notorious Lily Peyton! Trust Verde's crowd to remember about the girl, and where she was.

Driving home, however, his shapely blond head back and his half shut eyes expressionless on the road, he'd forgotten Lily Peyton's girl. "Do call," Loris Kayne had said in her precise, careless little voice. Do call? He would.

Down Bleeker Hill and out past the area of trees and boulevard lights. Something of his exultant mood passed as the streets became meaner and the houses more crowded. Now he was skirting the shore again. He passed a row of summer cottages set up on stilts, and a curve of shining water cutting in. The sea smell came to his nostrils.

The pressed look about the lips that Vinny was coming to wear constantly at home appeared as he turned in by the cindered path that led to the converted stable garage. The place was hopeless, that was all.

He gained his own room, and the sight of Gerald asleep, with lips parted over crooked front teeth, didn't help. Standing at the window in pyjamas, and staring out over the sagging porch roof, up the ratty brick walk and down drab Archer Street, that didn't help, either.

He had a hang over from Greenlawns.

It had to be Lucia, of course, getting his breakfast. She was always there. He couldn't enter his own home any more without being confronted by Lily Peyton's daughter. Well, stepdaughter. His mind made the correction savagely. Lily Peyton's girl was something for his resentment to focus itself on.

The toast was the particular thin, hard, golden kind he liked, the bacon was crisp, luscious curls, and his eggs were just firm enough; but nothing was as it should have been for Vinny. The spell of Greenlawns was upon him.

This eating breakfast in the kitchen, being waited on by Lucia Peyton, not as maid, but as member of the family! By and by she would sit down opposite him, frightened dusky eyes under fluttering lashes.

He rattled his paper restively. Home Gordon was leaving for Yale this morning. Dean Clark was having a

year on a student ship—around the world! And Lily Peyton's girl. He scowled at her.

"Where's mother?" he asked curtly.

"Mrs. Gorman's been sick all night. She's over there." Lucia's voice was low.

"When will they learn my mother's not a community nurse?" he wanted to know. "When will they learn this isn't an orphan asylum?" he continued in a low voice as she disappeared into the pantry for more butter. He colored immediately then.

Well, she hadn't heard. He tucked the paper into his pocket and went precipitantly, hating himself, hating Lily Peyton's girl, hating their unimpressive section of Belmeer and the worn blue suit that was taking him a round-about way to the station these days.

In the train he drew his paper close to hide the suit from more successful commuters. "Book passage on the Homeric," he read. "White Star Line. Mediterranean cruise. Christmas in Palestine." His eyes traveled again out over the marshes and discontent darkened them. Some day. Some day he'd get away.

His thoughts turned then to Loris Kayne. How soon could he call on her? Not before Tuesday, at least. That left to-night open. Let's see—why not try to find out about those little dogs? There was a place he knew on Fifth Avenue. Then, when he saw Loris again—

III

THE Rincé was rumbling again up the driveway at Greenlawns. It was the seventh time. Twelve days of Loris Kayne's visit had passed, and seven times Vinny's car had turned in at the drive.

Verde Lake's crowd had had little things to say, of course.

"Guess who I saw driving out Radnor Road—" Peg Whitten had laughed into the phone Wednesday morning. She'd paused for dramatic effect.

"Who, Peg?" Verde was politely interested.

"Loris Kayne"—Peg paused again—"and Vinny Edwards."

"Loris and Vinny?"

"Yes, Vinny Edwards. Imagine those two!"

"Well, she liked him at the party, you know," Verde said absently. "Did you hear who won the singles, Peg?"

"Irene Rand. Don't you think it's queer?"

"No, I thought she'd win."

"But Vinny Edwards and Loris Kayne!"

"Oh!" Verde laughed. "Vin's all right."

"Well"—Peg's little laugh would not be gainsaid—"I think it's queer. Those two!"

Thursday Vinny came home on the early train and changed clothes in a frenzy of speed. He was taking Loris out to Harbor Lights for dinner. A twosome.

Loris Kayne and Harbor Lights! Alice and Florence closed their eyes and whirled.

"Oh, Alice!"

"I know. Wouldn't you love to see her?"

"My Heavens, wouldn't I though?"

"Imagine her liking our Vin, Flo."

"I don't know why she shouldn't."

Florence tossed her head complacently. "Isn't he the best-looking man in town?"

No one could have been less conscious of comment or less concerned with it than Vinny and Loris, driving up to the Glendenning home that night. Moonlight bathed the great white pile and Vinny caught his breath, coming upon it around the bend in the drive. A thousand little Christmas trees stood sharply outlined and the waters of a white stone framed pool sent out silvered shafts.

Loris and Vinny were quiet. They'd had a quiet drive. Vinny had been thinking that this was about over, this satisfactory time. In three days Loris's

boat sailed. What if she had liked him, he thought, slouched over his wheel? He wasn't even sure of that.

She was a queer girl, and it was hard to get at her likes and dislikes. She was enamel finish. Well, what if she had liked him a little better than the others, then? It was nearly over now. And there'd be a finality to his parting with her that there wouldn't have been to Dean Clark's, say, or Home Gordon's.

Those others' paths might cross hers again some time; his never would. He'd go back to hanging on the edges of things, accepted because in Belmeer sometimes personable escorts were scarce. Rather different from being the chosen companion of Loris Kayne.

The car stopped, and neither of them moved.

"Perhaps you're tired," he suggested. "Shall I go on home?" He looked at her hopefully. He was really asking permission to come in again, to see the stretches of silver that would be moonlight on polished floors, to see the glow of color from a Persian scarf, or a high light in one of Miriam's porcelains.

"Let's sit out here for awhile," she stirred. "It's too wonderful to go in."

"It is wonderful," he agreed. "Look through those trees over there," he told her.

They looked together, and another silence fell. "Oh," she remembered, "we're sailing on Thursday at four. Can you come?"

"No. I—I work, Loris."

"But one day won't matter."

"I'm afraid—"

"Do come. It's a new boat. Uncle Woods has called it the Loris. I want—"

"I'll tell you how it is. I've a conference just at four o'clock that afternoon. It's rather important. The man is leaving on the Leviathan on Saturday. You see—" Vinny's cheeks were hot.

"Oh, it doesn't matter." She turned

a ring on her finger and another silence fell.

There were other things Vinny could have said—truthful things. They hummed in his head. "I'm afraid to take even a day. It's dull season at Price-Ferriss's. My mother did our washing this week," he could have said. "The girls stayed home from the movies to-night so that I could buy five gallons of gas."

He could have said things. Why should he? Not to-night! To-night was beautiful. They were out of the car now, and walking in the hushed stillness of the park. If you followed the Glendenning grounds far enough you came upon golden sands and quiet waters.

Vinny guided her eastward. He wanted to stand with her on the sands and look out over the waters. There was a moon. They bumped together now and then, walking close. She caught his hand. To-night was beautiful.

"There." His breath came out slowly. The sea was golden here. You couldn't believe that but five or six miles down the beach these same waves were breaking in front of the fishery, and the crowded shacks of the fishermen, and the marked shack where Lily Peyton had lived. He shook his head impatiently, and looked at Loris Kayne. That was as good a way as any to forget Lucia Peyton.

"The sea's always the same, isn't it?" She moved discontentedly. She pressed near him suddenly. Her fingers touched his hand, his arm, his cheek. She lifted up her lips.

They walked slowly back to the house. This was a dream, and his voice came out of it strangely. "You'll be sailing on Thursday, Loris?"

"Perhaps not, after all. Uncle Woods has wired mother to know if I may stay."

"Here, at Greenlawns?"

"Until Christmas, anyway. At least, I think I'll stay here for the Governor's

ball. You'll go in our party, won't you?"

She waited.

"I haven't a card, Loris."

"Oh!" Her frown was there and then gone. "I'll get you one," she said. "It's nice to be nice to some one nice-looking like you." She squeezed his hand for good night, and her laugh followed him across the silver band of moonlight and was in his ears like brilliant piano music when he climbed into his car.

Vinny coasted down Bleeker Hill. He was drugged. He took the shore road, and even the sea wind in his face couldn't rouse him from his dream. He couldn't go home yet; couldn't pass those forlorn little summer cottages under the moon.

There was a light in the second floor of the Lakes' big stone home. He thought of Miriam Lake, and of how she had married old Glendenning, and secured beauty for her own forever. He stopped the laboring Rincé and looked out over the water.

Loris Kayne! Her white hand with the gorgeous ring on it! It held so carelessly all the things he'd ever dreamed of having. There was Miriam Lake. A girl could marry out of her circle, but a man—

Could a man?

IV

He came up the steps at home slowly. The same moon that had glorified the terraces at Greenlawns was bathing the Edwardses' broken brown house in its splendor. Halfway across the porch Vinny paused. Some one had fallen asleep on the couch hammock. He walked over absently, and was on the point of shaking the sleeper when he stopped short. It was Lucia. An old sweater of Gerald's was carelessly over her, one arm was thrown up over her head.

He turned away again and went up the stairs. Well, it wasn't up to him to wake her, surely. She had to be al-

ways around under his—under his feet, did she? He couldn't come in at ten minutes past twelve in the night without seeing her, her arm thrown up over her head that way. Vinny sat down on the edge of his bed and tried to think. Loris Kayne! Loris Kayne had said—

How white a girl could look in the moonlight! How white, and yet how alive. How the tides of being alive could seem to seep under her white skin. Nineteen, too—Lucia Peyton. Loris Kayne, nineteen—assured, cool, traveling about the world.

And Lucia Peyton, nineteen, asleep on the couch hammock under Gerald's old sweater, and with the moon shining on her white face. Loris Kayne and Lucia Peyton. Old Glendenning's niece and Lily Peyton's girl. A rich girl and a poor girl. A girl who all her life had walked in beauty, and a girl from the fishermen's point.

Vinny went to the window. The moon was dimmer now, and a fog was coming in. It hung in faint trails on the horizon. You couldn't see the low hill behind the marsh.

"It's nothing to me if she's cold. It's no concern of mine if she wants to sleep out there."

He went back down the stairs and out on the porch. He'd have to say "Lucia," and shake the swing a little. He found he didn't want to say "Lucia," didn't remember ever having said it. It seemed suddenly impossible to wake her. The easiest thing in the world, and yet impossible.

He lighted a cigarette and looked down at her. Nineteen, too—Lily Peyton's girl. Head back, short hair curled up and wild, lips slightly parted and that white arm flung up. The fog was in now. Vinny shivered in his white shirt.

"She's a fool, that's all. Get up, little fool," he felt like saying. Nineteen, and looking like a baby.

He found himself shaking her very gently then. He found he'd caught

the hand cupped over her head. "Lucia," he had said softly.

She awoke with a sleepy smile. "Vinny!"

"Yes." He'd dropped her hand quickly enough, and his lips were pressed tight again. "You ought to know better than to go to sleep out here, I should think. It's got cold. There's a fog. Suppose—"

She got up, and her smile faded. She stood swinging Gerald's sweater aimlessly, looking at him.

"There's a fog, I said." There was a confusion in Vinny's speech. "It's cold. You might have slept there all night. Why—why don't you go to bed?" he asked violently.

She walked to the porch rail and leaned against a post, her slight figure a cameo in the dim light. She looked up at the pale moon, and her fear of him seemed gone.

"I waited up for you," she began.

"You waited up for me?" Vinny's assurance returned in a flood. "But why?" He could laugh now. He wished his voice wouldn't sound so queer.

"I wanted to tell you something." Lucia turned from the moon.

"You wanted to tell me something?" His teeth showed in an uncertain smile. "It's after twelve o'clock," he said evenly. "Can't it wait?"

"I—I guess it can." She hesitated. "Good night, Vinny," she said faintly from the doorway.

She was gone, up the stairs. Nothing left of her but a round pressed place in the cushion on the swing, and Vinny shook that out angrily. She had something to tell him! Lily Peyton's girl. Well, he didn't need to think about Lucia—not to-night, at any rate.

There was a cool touch on his hand. There was laughter like piano music in his ears. He was to have a card to the Governor's ball. Perhaps he would get away. Men could step out of their

circles, too. If he played his cards carefully—

He gave the family fleeting, impatient thought. Gerald's round, scornful eyes and his mother's harassed gray ones. Alice's giggle and Florence's habit of saying "My Heavens!" and saying it too loud. Patched tablecloths and nicked china and cheap suits. A front porch like this one, with a faded khaki hammock with rusty chains.

He sat down on the hammock and watched the moon change to a mere blur in the sky. He watched the moon, but he was seeing other things. The sweep of green lawns, the gashes of color that were gay awnings. The sky seemed a gray sea then, and the fog a great boat riding in, its rail a tracery of telegraph wires.

Loris Kayne was leaning indolently against the rail, a great white Russian dog of some sort at her side. Perhaps he could be there, too. It was all a question of playing your cards right. Miriam Lake had done it. A quick flush leaped into his cheek.

But she liked him. Vinny knew girls. "Loris Kayne." He said her name softly.

Another name came unbidden to his lips. "Lucia." Nineteen, too. How white she'd looked lying there! Why had she smiled like that, waking up? Why had she said "Vinny" in that sleepy voice?

He turned suddenly and went in and closed the door. There was a light showing under the door of the room where Lucia slept. He went in and sat on the side of his bed and heard Gerald breathe. He went slowly back then and stared at that line of white light for a moment, and then tapped softly.

"Good night, Lucia," he said.

Lucia! Lucia! He'd never said it at all before to-night, and now he'd said it twice. It was a soft sort of name that got into your mind and stayed there. It could get into your

blood and keep you from sleeping, too. Lucia! It was a name meant to be said softly.

V

He hurried for his train next morning.

"Vinny," his mother said as she stopped him at the door, "did you know Lucia's going away?"

"Going away?" he repeated, and stared at her. It was unusual for him to see that look of faint accusation in her eyes.

"Yes, to New York—to look for something to do. They sold Lily Peyton's furniture at auction yesterday, and there was forty dollars clear. Vinny"—the faint accusation crept into her voice—"the girls say it's because she thinks you don't want her here. I'd hate to think—" Her hands crept to his shoulders. "What if it were Alice or Florence?"

"I'm sure—" He shook her hands away. "I have to get my train whether Lucia Peyton takes it into her head to go away or whether she doesn't. I'm sure—it's no concern of mine. I—I've got to get my train." He hurried away. He ran down the last block and swung on to the seven ten.

"I hope she does go." He rattled his paper, trying to erase an image from before his eyes. "Am I responsible for Lily Peyton's girl?"

He couldn't answer that question.

"It's what I want," he insisted. "I want her to go."

His head ached by noon. Already he was dreading supper that night. There'd be that accusing look in his mother's eyes and the girls would sit thinking Lucia. He'd be able to feel them thinking it, and wouldn't be able to do anything about it. Lucia—she would be there, too. Vinny pictured the scene.

There'd be a wall up against him, and Gerald peering over the wall in open scorn. There'd be Lucia, her slight body drooped and her frightened

eyes avoiding his; or not afraid now, and with her white face tilted up as it had been when she'd looked at the moon last night. That white face in New York! Where would she live? What would she do?

"A girl—a girl has no business to be such a baby."

She was close before him suddenly, between him and his figures, looking at him with that sleepy smile in her eyes—the smile a chap would seldom see. "Vinny—"

Supper was as he had thought it would be. He pressed his lips close and kept his eyes trained carefully away from her, slender and white and still at the table across from him. Slender and white and still on the front steps, too, when he went down.

Up Archer Street, up Bleeker Hill, and out Radnor Road, the boy who was going to play his cards right and secure an entry into the world of beauty where Loris Kayne lived. He, too, would be able to collect old glass and to caress it with his fingers.

He'd know the feel of gleaming old Chinese silks, and live with the sort of paintings that hung on the walls at Greenlawns. "It's all a question of playing your cards right."

The old car went slower and slower, and soon was merely creeping along. "It's all a question of playing your cards." The words lost their meaning as he repeated them.

He and Loris played duty bridge with Miriam and her husband, and Vinny trumped aces heedlessly and revoked once or twice. Some of the magic departed from Greenlawns, leaving it a stiff and rather cold-appearing place where it seemed you had to be constantly raising your voice a little to be heard across too great distances.

Then Miriam went up the polished steps that led to the great pipe organ old Glendenning had had installed for her. The lights were out, and tiers of candles were blowing. The music was something that stirred the heart

strangely. It was beautiful, as beautiful as a slow smile out of eyes still shadowed with sleep.

"I must go," he said brusquely. Loris seemed ghostlike in the candlelight. She followed him through the door and out into the moonlight.

"Wait," she said. She caught his hand and again let her fingers creep up his arm. He could see that she expected him to take things up from where they'd left them on the beach. Girls always expected you to. "I have something for you," she said, and thrust it into his hand. It was the card for the Governor's ball.

"Yes. Thanks," he murmured, stumbling away. "Good night, Loris."

He didn't see any detail of Radnor Road, nor of Bleeker Place, nor of Archer Street. He saw only the ribbon of road being wound rapidly under his car.

Lucia, miraculously, was on the swing. She started up, and would have hurried away at his coming, but, "Lucia!" he stopped her. "I—I want to talk to you, Lucia."

There was a note of humility in his voice. "Listen, you're not to go away. You—you're not, that's all." His eyes were intent and anxious upon hers. He felt confused, but knew it was very important that she should stay.

"I'm all packed," she said, and

smiled at him shyly. "The girls wanted me to go to the movies, but I stayed home and—got ready."

"You're not to go." He repeated it helplessly. "You're not to go. Wait—" He drew her back down to the swing. "I want to talk to you. I haven't meant—I mean I'm sorry. You will stay, won't you? My mother needs you."

Her wide dark eyes were on his face. "It's all right," she assured him softly. "It isn't on account of any one. It isn't for any reason that I'm going."

"My mother needs you, Lucia."

"No. She's just good-hearted."

His confusion melted into a vivid realization that here was the quality which had made the Glendenning beauty seem cold. This was a warm, spontaneous beauty which transcended the cold formality of material things; this was the real beauty of which the other things were only symbols.

"Lucia, I need you," he said humbly.

"You mean—" Her head went down slowly.

"Yes." He tilted it up again until his eyes met hers. "I need you," he repeated, watching a slow smile wake in her eyes and travel down to her slightly parted lips.

"Lucia!" He kissed her. "You're—you're beautiful!"

AUGUST

STARSHINE and moonshine and harvest gold,
A veil of beauty o'er lane and wold;

Winds that whisper and streams that call,
And diamond dewdrops that lightly fall,

Birds in branches of elm and beech,
Crooning a night song, each to each,

And far off, over a spruce dark hill
The plaintive note of a whippoorwill,

List, my lady, the night grows late,
Summer is calling, and must Love wait?

L. Mitchell Thornton



DAISY PAINTED IT IN
BRILLIANT BANDS

The Coral Snake

*A Modern Eve Lends Color to the Rumor That There Are a Million Ways
to Win the Affections of Young Adam*

By Ellis Parker Butler



JOE TURNER ran his light farm truck into the gutter in front of Daisy Walters's home on the edge of town and set his brakes. From the seat beside him he took a rectangular parcel wrapped in paper. It contained two boxes of strawberries, the choicest of those yet ripe on his place. It would be a full week before the crop would be ready for the pickers, but these were the first of the perfect fruit, and he had sorted them himself as a present for Daisy.

Within certain limits the strawberries were to be a peace offering. The course of true love had not been run-

ning smooth for Joe. Daisy had quite an independent little mind of her own, and two days earlier they had had what Joe thought was their final quarrel; but he had been thinking it over.

Largely because he had felt since the quarrel that life would not be worth living without Daisy, he had convinced himself that Daisy must be feeling the same way, and now he had come bringing strawberries to give her another chance to make everything all right.

Before he was halfway up the walk Daisy opened the door, and at this first sight of her something in Joe warmed with resentment, for she was wearing her painting smock, and held her pal-

ette and brushes in her hand. It was as if she had announced that she did not mean to give in, because it was her painting that had been the cause of the quarrel.

"Why, Joe!" she exclaimed, her face all smiles of welcome as she saw the parcel he was carrying. She knew it must be strawberries, and that he would be bringing them only because he had thought twice about their difference of opinion. "Strawberries, Joe? Now, that's just dear of you—just perfectly dear!"

"I thought maybe you'd like some," he said. "They're pretty nice, if I do say it. Looks as if my crop was going to be a hummer this time. You're still painting, I notice."

"Of course," she laughed, and the laugh was not very pleasant to Joe. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"Well, I thought—" Joe said. "But of course what I think don't make any difference to you."

"But it certainly does!" Daisy exclaimed. "It just does so! You know I care everything in the world for what you think, Joe."

He brightened at that.

"Then you've given up that fool notion of going to the city to take lessons from that smart Aleck painter, have you?" he asked.

But Daisy, still smiling, shook her head.

"Now, Joe, do be sensible," she begged. "I think you're absolutely unfair. But I will not quarrel with you in the front yard. If you want to talk about it you'll have to come in the house."

Reluctantly, for the making-up was not proceeding as simply as Joe had hoped it would, he went in. As he saw the canvas on the easel in the little parlor, he frowned. Their disagreement had come about because Joe wanted her to marry him as soon as the strawberry crop was out of the way, while Daisy wanted him to wait another year.

"Joe," she had said, "we can just as well wait as not, and better. Mother says seventeen is too young, and your mother says we'll be all the better for waiting a year, and I do want to have a year of art lessons, Joe. In fact, I'm going to have a year of art lessons. I don't expect to be a real artist, and maybe I won't have much time to give to it after we're married, but I know well enough that if I want to learn anything about it, the time is right now, before I am married. A married woman doesn't get time."

"I'll let you have time," Joe had said, but he had not quite meant it.

What he thought was that when they were married Daisy would forget this foolishness about wanting to paint pictures. He hated worst of all the idea of letting Daisy go to the city for a whole season. She might meet some one she would like better.

So they had quarreled, and Joe had gone home, saying he was through with her forever.

And now he was back again.

He looked at the picture on the easel, on which Daisy had been working, and his impulse was to lift his foot and kick a hole in it; but he felt that diplomacy and tact were called for.

It was a painting of a rustic bridge with a hillside and a little stream. The stream did look like a strip of tin, and the grass was a startling shade of green, but there could be no question that the sky was blue. It was the bluest sky any one ever saw. It was a great improvement over any ordinary sky either Daisy or Joe had ever seen, for it looked solid and durable, like blue marble.

Joe studied the picture carefully.

"Well, anyway," he said, "I like it better without the cows. Those pigs are pretty big pigs, but anybody would know they were pigs—and that's one thing."

"They aren't pigs," said Daisy, reddening a little. "They're the same cows, only I've made them lie down."

"You ought to put horns on them," Joe said. "How can a fellow tell whether they're pigs or cows if you don't put horns on them?"

"They're dehorned cows," Daisy said with some spirit. "I can't paint horns on dehorned cows, can I?"

"Then I'd call them pigs," Joe said. "I wouldn't try to paint cows without horns, Daisy—they look too much like pigs."

"There!" Daisy exclaimed. "You can't tell my cows from pigs, Joe Turner, and yet you won't say I need a few lessons if I'm ever going to paint anything at all! How can I paint cows that don't look like pigs if I don't have some lessons? And I am going to have some lessons! I am! I'm not going to marry any one who thinks my cows are pigs! I—I'm not going to marry any one until I can paint cows that look like cows!"

Joe glared at her.

"You listen!" he cried. "I came here to give you one more chance to quit this foolishness, and I was ready to let you paint your head off if you'd marry me in June. But now I'm done! It's me or those paints, and you can take your choice. Me or the paints—take your choice!"

"Joe Turner, don't you speak to me in that tone of voice! I'm going to paint, and I'm going to have some lessons—"

Joe turned and took one long stride toward the door, but before he reached it he turned again and thrust his parcel at her.

"Here's your strawberries," he said in the tone of a man meaning "Go to thunder!"

"I don't want your strawberries," Daisy declared. "And until you can come and speak decently to me you needn't come back, Joe Turner!"

"Don't you worry, I won't come back!" he cried. "If you ever get any sense and want me back you can send for me. Paint—hah! Pigs—hah! Cows—hah!"

When he was out of the house Daisy stood for a moment, straight and with head high, furiously angry, and then her eyes turned to the painting. She had to admit that the cows did look like pigs. She sank to the floor before the easel and wept.

Joe, putting the parcel containing the strawberries on the free seat, got into the car and started it. He looked at his watch and saw that he had fifteen minutes before the arrival of the train he had come to meet.

At that moment a plan of revenge came into his mind.

The last time he had come to town he had gone around checking up his berry pickers to make sure they would be on hand when the strawberries were ripe, and he had found that one of the girls would not be able to pick for him this year because she was sick.

It now occurred to him that he would take the strawberries to Etta Burling. She was a nice girl, and if Daisy was going to act unreasonably he would show her that she was not the only girl in the world. Mrs. Burling came to the door.

"I brought something for Etta," Joe said, tendering the parcel that Daisy had rejected.

"Now, that's real nice of you, Joseph," Etta's mother said. "She'll be real pleased."

"First first-class strawberries I've picked," said Joe. "Tell her I hope she enjoys them."

Mrs. Burling looked at him. His face still held some of the unpleasantness it had gathered at Daisy's, and Mrs. Burling was a woman of quick temper.

"Humph! Strawberries!" she exclaimed, and, thrusting the parcel into Joe's hands, she shut the door in his face. Etta had the mumps.

"Well, I'll be darned!" Joe said in amazement. "I wonder what's the matter with her now?"

Not knowing that Etta's mother had thought he was trying to play a joke

on her daughter, he drove on down to the railway station and backed his truck to the platform.

II

HALF an hour later, as Joe Turner drove his truck into the house yard of his home, he hit his horn a couple of bumps with his palm, causing it to utter two honks, and at the same time he shouted "Oh, ma!" Mrs. Turner came to the kitchen door, wiping her hands on her apron.

"I got him," he said, as Mrs. Turner untied her apron and tossed it behind her into the kitchen. "Ma, this is Professor Dillwat."

The professor was already getting out of the truck at the far side, but Mrs. Turner could see that he was not at all the sort of man she had expected. When Ed Vance had written from South Carolina that a professor he had met there wanted to be taken in as a boarder for a week or so, she had imagined that he would be something far more grand.

She had thought, for some reason, that a professor would be a large man with whiskers and a silk hat.

What she saw was a nervous little man, in something like a golf suit, wearing a cap that appeared to be several sizes too large for him, with huge, horn-rimmed spectacles, and hair that hung almost to his shoulders and was snowy white. Mrs. Turner's first guess was that he must be eighty years old at least.

In the back of the truck were three trunks of assorted sizes, a Gladstone bag so shabby that it was tied with rope, four large corrugated-paper boxes, and one wooden box. These contained, for the most part, the specimens of flowers and plants the professor had collected in the Carolinas during his year's stay there.

In his hands he carried another box, about two feet square, wrapped in tough, brown paper, and tied around and around in every direction with

stout white cord of the sort used by fishermen for nets and by sailors for hammocks.

In the paper that covered the top of the box numerous small holes had been cut or torn, indicating that the box contained some living creature that might require air, and the professor carried the box by the string, showing the utmost care, and holding it well away from him.

He came around the truck carrying his precious box thus, his nervous face trying at once to give Mrs. Turner a greeting smile and at the same time showing his preoccupation of care for the box.

Joe's mother was about to speak words of welcome when the professor's foot alighted on a slippery bone the dog had abandoned, and he plunged forward. The box came down on the edge of the porch with a thump, and the professor's fist bumped into the top of the box with considerable violence.

Instantly the professor threw himself forward across the top of the box, covering it with his chest, while he spread out his hands and legs in an X, holding them as far from the box as possible.

"A—a board! A towel! Something—quick!" he cried. "Nails! A hammer! Tacks! Madam, a towel, please—a towel!"

"My goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Turner, for Joe, at the very mention of nails and a hammer, had started for the shed at a dead run.

She hurried into the kitchen and was out again in a moment with the roller towel.

"Keep back! Don't come near!" exclaimed the professor. "Toss it. And that washboard. Hurry, please! Keep back—keep back!"

Mrs. Turner bunched the towel into a ball and tossed it, and she slid the washboard along the porch floor. The little professor's face was red with excitement and the tenseness of his ef-

forts. He raised his chest the slightest fraction of an inch at a time and worked the towel between it and the box.

Then, holding the towel as tightly down the sides of the box as he could with both hands, he bit the leg of the washboard and thus lifted it atop the towel, immediately bearing his full weight on the washboard. When he was holding the washboard firmly down with his hands, he ejected a sigh of relief.

"What is it? What's in the box?" asked Mrs. Turner, keeping far from the box.

"An *Elaps fulvius*; a remarkably splendid specimen, madam," said the professor. "One of the finest I have ever seen."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Turner. "Does it bite?"

"Virulently—most virulently," said the professor. "Most fortunate it did not escape. Would you mind handing me that mop? Please remove the rag from it. I am not at all confident of this covering."

The professor did not mean to kill the *Elaps fulvius* with the mop if the *Elaps fulvius* got out of the box. He thought that he might be able to press the wire of the mop down on the neck of the *Elaps fulvius* just back of the head and thus recapture it, and now he released one hand long enough to tuck the mop handle under his left arm.

He was in this position when Joe came running with the hammer and enough nails and tacks to put up a shed. He put them on the edge of the porch, within reach of the professor's hand, and stood back.

"Stand back there, mother!" he said sharply, and Mrs. Turner retreated to the kitchen door.

The professor, holding down the washboard with one hand, reached for the hammer.

"If you would just hold this down for me," he said to Joe.

"Not me!" said Joe. "Not on your

life! I don't fool with that thing, not any."

"What is it, Joe?" asked Mrs. Turner from the doorway.

"It's a snake," Joe said. "Poison snake, ma. One sting and—bingo!—you're done. It's a coral snake. He got it down South there."

"You can't have that on my porch, professor," Mrs. Turner said imperatively. "Take it right off my porch. Take it away this instant!"

"Yes, indeed," the professor agreed pleasantly. "Bless me, I'm sorry to cause all this annoyance. Most unfortunate. Ah, there you are!" he cried, peering into the box. "My agitation was quite unnecessary," he went on, "for the specimen seems not to have attempted to escape. I feared I had driven my hand through the netting, but a tack or two will repair the damage nicely. The loss of this beautiful specimen would have been a great privation to me."

"I don't know that I'd care so very much to have a poison snake wandering around loose, either," said Mrs. Turner, mollified by the professor's gentleness, and by the fact that the interesting specimen was now safely confined again. "Where you going to put it, Joe?"

"I ain't going to put it anywhere," Joe said. "I ain't going to touch it. Might put it in the shed, but we'll be needing that for the sorting and crating. I don't know just where to put it, ma. We might put it on that stump back of the shed. It won't hurt it to be outdoors, will it, professor?"

"Oh, no; no, indeed!" said the professor. "The *Elaps fulvius* is quite an outdoor reptile. Known as the harlequin or coral snake because of its color, it frequents the woods from South Carolina to Western Texas and—"

"Well, never mind that now," said Mrs. Turner. "You get it off my porch, and if you've got any alligators or horned toads or things in those

trunks and boxes, don't bring them in the house. Joe, you and the professor must be sure to wash your hands before you come in. Poison snakes! My, my!"

Joe, now that the wire screen was in place, had ventured near enough to the box to look down into it, and he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Golly! What a beauty! Ma, just come and look at this snake, will you? You never saw anything like this in your life, I bet you!"

The snake, an unusually large specimen, as the professor had said, was fully three feet long, and beautifully colored. Its body was banded with alternate equal stripes of red and black, and between each two bands was a stripe of bright yellow. But, although Joe begged his mother to look, she would have none of it.

"No," she said, "and get it off my porch. Professor, you take that box around to the stump Joe will show you. And Joe, you paint a sign to put on it: 'Danger—Poison Snake,' or something. Goodness knows that those girl berry pickers from town are sure to meddle with everything they can poke into, and I don't want them bit to death by any poison snake. Berry picking is enough trouble without having a lot of dead berry pickers spread all over the place. You carry that box yourself, professor; don't you touch it, Joe!"

Joe painted a warning sign to stand against the stump. They found the professor, after this excitement was over, a pleasant enough boarder. During the day he was always away from the house, and the evenings he spent classifying and pressing the plants he had gathered during the day. The principal object of his visit was put off for a few days while he waited for his rubber hip boots to arrive by express, he having absent-mindedly left them in South Carolina.

Professor Dillwat needed the boots to tramp the swamps. He had met Ed

Vance in the Carolinas, where Ed had gone for ducks and the professor for a specimen of that rare flower, the Venus's flytrap, recorded as having been found only on those coasts. Ed had told him the plant had once been found near his home, in the neighborhood of the Turners.

To find another "station" of the plant would be to the eager little professor quite what finding America was to Columbus, and Ed Vance had arranged for him to board a week or two with the Turners. Mrs. Turner was doubtful about the plant. She remembered that her father had once found something like it, but she did not remember it very well.

She thought it was not quite like the picture the professor showed her, but this made him all the more eager—to find a new variety of the flytrap would be even greater delight.

There were swamps and to spare near by, but Mrs. Turner seemed to remember that her father had found his plant in Tilliman's Swamp, twenty miles west of the strawberry farm.

"You could hire Harry Walters's car," Mrs. Turner told the professor.

But Joe spoke up immediately. "Leave the Walterses be, ma," he said. "I don't want to have any dealings with them. I'm through with all of them. I'll get him a car in town without bothering with them."

"The trouble with you, Joe," his mother said, "is that you're just so pig-headed and stiff-necked you won't admit you're wrong when you're wrong. I say it's a mortal shame the way you treated Daisy Walters. The poor girl's just sick over it. I saw her last week, and that's just how she looked—sick."

Joe got up and went out. He was through with Daisy Walters, and there was no sense in fussing with his mother about it. He telephoned to town and hired Will Mercer and his car for the professor, and, as soon as the boots came, the professor left in

the car for Tilliman's Swamp, Will driving, taking a tent and enough provisions for two weeks.

III

THEY left Sunday, and Monday morning the strawberry picking began in good earnest. Some of the pickers had cars of their own, and filled them with their girl friends. Joe and his mother drove to town with the truck and the other car and picked up the rest.

The berries were prime now, and would ripen daily until the end of the season; and would be as prompt to overripen and decay if not picked. But the Turners were always fortunate in securing pickers. The girls liked to pick for Joe.

As the first loads of girls got out of the cars, chattering and merry, Mrs. Turner called them to her and gave them a warning.

"I want to tell you girls one thing," she said, "before you start in. You want to keep away from that stump by the shed. I had Joe paint a sign and put it there; but signs don't mean anything to some of you these days, and I want to tell you that sign means what it says. There's a poison snake in that box, and if it was to bite you you'd die in a minute. You remember that!"

"What have you got it there for, then?" asked one of the girls.

"Well, it ain't mine," said Mrs. Turner. "Goodness knows I don't want it there! It's the professor's. Don't go near it."

The result was that they all went near it immediately. They crowded around the box and peered into it, ejaculating over the beauty of the red and black bands and yellow rings. Finally Joe had to urge them to stand away from the box.

"Kill you quicker than a minute, it would," he warned them.

And the snake, as if to approve his words, raised its head and shot out its

quivering, bisected tongue and moved in indolent waves, gliding around the box and seeking a place to escape. Some of the girls uttered shrill little screams of fright or pretended fright. But presently they were all in the strawberries, busily picking.

The snake, however, proved an attraction they could not resist. At noon, and again before leaving for home, they had to have a look at the beautiful, deadly reptile, and the next day their interest was unabated. They found a sort of pleasant horror in peering at the gaudy snake, as perhaps Eve once felt, and they constantly talked about it.

When they were all gone Tuesday afternoon, and the packers were busy in the shed, Joe himself went to have another look at the snake. He was worried about it. Some of the girls were a little too fearless, and had rapped on the screen top of the box with sticks to make the snake show signs of life and dart out its tongue. Joe wanted to make sure the screen was still tightly nailed down. He walked up to the box and looked down into it.

The snake was gone!

Joe's first feeling was one of relief. They were rid of the deadly thing, and it was good riddance. He noticed that where four of the tacks had held the screen the wood had been split by the tacks. Here was the slightest possible opening now between the screen and the wood, and here the coral snake had evidently squeezed through.

Joe looked at the ground, but neither near the box nor far from it could he see any trace of the snake. It was gone. But a second later he had another thought.

No doubt the snake had made for the woods on the hill beyond the shed, but who would know that? The berry pickers would come in the morning and they would see the box empty and know the snake had escaped, and how many of them would bend down over

the strawberry vines after that? Not one, as Joe very well knew.

He looked toward his broad spreading strawberry patches, where the berries were now ripening almost faster than his many pickers could gather them, and then he went to the shed.

"Carter," he said, "come out here a minute."

His foreman packer came from the shed.

"What is it, Joe?" he asked.

"Come over here where nobody'll hear us," Joe said. "Carter, that snake got out of that box. You know what that means. If those girls know it they'll every one quit us in a minute and never come back."

"Thunder!" Carter exclaimed.

"But, Joe, all you've got to do is take that box away and hide it somewhere. Tell them you put it somewhere else, Joe."

"And that new lot of girls coming out to-morrow?" said Joe. "Every one of them will want to know where that snake is, and want to see it, and won't give us a minute's rest till they do see it. Carter, we've got to have a snake; a coral snake. If we don't we'll have a scare and we won't have a girl left on the place. I've got to get a snake!"

"Where you going to get one?"

"I'll get me a milk snake and paint it," Joe said. "I see one or two every time I go up there around the barn. I can get me one. What I want, Carter, is for you to stay on to-night and help me paint the snake. I can't paint a snake alone—not banded like that coral snake. I could give it a plain coat of one color easy enough, but a snake wiggles too much to paint it fancy like that coral snake."

"Well, I don't mind, Joe," Carter said. "A little overtime won't hurt me any. Have you got paint?"

"No, blame it—not the right kind," Joe said with vexation. "I've got some black and green, but I haven't got any red and yellow."

"I'll tell you what, then," Carter said. "I'll take your car and get down to town and get some paint before the stores close, and you'd better get out after your snake. Gosh, I wish I'd took more notice what kind of red and yellow that snake was! There's more shades of red and yellow than a pumpkin's got seeds."

"You'd better get a yellow on a sort of orange order, near as I can judge," Joe said, "and if a coral snake oughtn't to be coral red, I don't know what it ought to be. Get along now, Carter. And, say—you'd better get some dryer to make the paint dry fast. I've got to get a snake."

Back of the barn the spring sent its surplus water through an open trough, and here there were usually snakes, harmless reptiles that sought the noisy frogs as food. It was almost impossible to walk through the grass there without seeing one of them slithering rapidly away.

Joe cut himself a crotched stick and went snake hunting. Luck was with him. Before he reached the open trough he saw the tail of a milk snake vanishing into the grass, and he leaped forward ahead of it and brought the crotch down.

He had his snake. It was a fine specimen, a full-grown milk snake, approximately three feet long, and he reached down and grasped it by the tail. The snake raised its head and hissed angrily, shooting out its forked tongue, and striking at the stick that still held it. But Joe had picked up many a snake in his boyhood.

He tightened his grasp on the tail and released the crotched stick and, holding the snake well away from him, carried it into the barn. He dropped it into an empty milk can and shut the lid on it.

Carter in due time returned with a parcel and slipped it from under his coat to Joe.

"Did the best I could," he said. "The yellow is a sort of lemon color,

but Martin said to mix some red with it and it would be orangy. I guess it 'll do."

IV

AFTER supper, when darkness had come, Joe and Carter went to the shed, telling Mrs. Turner they had a job of work to get cleaned up. They placed the lanterns on one of the sorting tables. Joe got the snake, while Carter opened the paint cans and stirred the color from the bottom. He had had the sense to get three or four small brushes, and these he laid on the table. When Joe brought the milk can, all was ready.

"I bet this snake will think it's going to a masquerade party by the time we get through with it," Carter said laughingly. "Will you paint while I hold, or will you hold while I paint, Joe?"

"I better hold, I guess," Joe said. "Anyway, we'll try it that way."

He opened the milk can, laid it on its side upon the table, and as the snake crawled out he grasped it firmly just back of its head. The snake immediately coiled its length around his arm, clinging like a clock spring. "You'll have to help me unwind it and straighten it out, Carter," he said. "I can't hardly handle it alone."

Between them they got the snake uncoiled, and, with Carter's help, stretched out at full length on the table. But a stretched snake is not necessarily a dormant snake. The milk snake seemed positively reluctant to be painted.

Although Joe could hold the head and the tail still on two spots, the three feet of snake in between was full of life and resentfulness. It was as flexible as an elephant's trunk. It swelled and shrunk, rose in humps and flattened down again, swayed from side to side.

One moment it was three feet of taut snake, and the next moment there seemed to be two extra feet of slack

between its head and tail. It twisted, turning its pale underside upward. At one instant one part of the snake was plump and solid and the next instant the plumpness was elsewhere and that part was flat and flabby.

"What color do you think I'd better put on it first, Joe?" Carter asked. "How about painting all the red bands on it first?"

"All right; about an inch and a half wide, I reckon. Far apart enough to get the black and yellow bands in between—two inches apart, maybe."

"Yeah! Hold her steady now," Carter said, and touched the back of the snake with the brush full of red paint. The snake must have been ticklish, for a whole section instantly flowed from where it had been to another place, and the result was a streak of red paint a foot long down the middle of the snake's back.

"You got to band it, not stripe it," Joe said. "You haven't forgot how the snake looked, have you?"

"Now, don't get excited," Carter said. "I know how that snake looked. She moved, that's all. I got to wipe off this stripe. Hold her a little tauter, Joe, can't you?"

"I'm holding her taut, ain't I?" Joe demanded. "I can't hold but two ends of her, can I? You want to paint quick, not hold the brush on her an hour or so. Sort of dab at her quick."

Carter wiped the paint off the snake with a bunch of waste and tried again. He "dabbed," as Joe had advised. But the snake moved over as he dabbed, and he dabbed the top of the table. The third dab did hit the snake, but it made only a spot on its back.

"That's no way," Joe complained. "It ain't a spotted snake; it's a banded snake."

"You said to dab it," Carter complained. "If you'd let me go ahead and paint this snake in my own way, and not fuss me all up by talking so much, maybe I'd get it painted. Now hold her steady, if you can."

In ten minutes the milk snake looked like a battlefield on which much blood had been shed. It was red, but not in bands. The red covered it in splotches, and the table was red, and Carter's overalls were red.

"How'd it do to paint her all red?" Carter asked, wiping a drop of perspiration from his eye with the back of his hand, as the middle part of the snake flopped and twisted in the red paint. "I mean, give her a coat all over, and then put on the black and yellow bands, Joe. We could sort of dip her in the red paint. It looks to me as if we'd never get red bands on her, the way we're going."

"It's going to take all night," Joe said, "and then we won't have anything that looks like anything if we don't do better than this. That red shows this snake's markings right through. We'll have to give her two coats; maybe three. Did you put plenty of dryer in the paint?"

"Dog it, no!" exclaimed Carter with disgust. "I clean forgot about that dryer."

"Then you got to start all over again," said Joe. "Wipe her off clean and start over. My arms are about busted, stretching her out like this. Wipe her off and I'll put her in the can until my arms rest, and you put dryer in the paint. You can hold her next time and I'll paint her."

"All right, paint her yourself," Carter said. "I don't claim to be a snake painter. But, gosh, Joe! You might as well try to paint a chipmunk while it's skittering around on a stone wall as to try to paint that snake."

"Well, we've got to get at it," Joe said.

This time Carter held the snake while Joe painted it. While watching Carter he had figured out just how to do it. He grasped the snake with thumb and finger just where he wanted to paint a red band and put the paint there. But the snake merely agitated itself, and the part of it that Joe had

painted slid forward. The paint remained in a blob against Joe's thumb and finger.

For half an hour Joe painted the snake. At the end of that time the snake was not a snake with brilliant red and yellow bands—it was a mottled milk snake with a reddish scum over its markings.

"One trouble," Carter said as he held the snake's head and tail apart, "is that we don't know how to paint anyway, and the other is that this ain't the right kind of paint to paint snakes. Now, if we were artist painters, like Daisy Walters, and had artist paints like hers—"

"Well, we ain't, and we haven't," Joe said.

"But we know where we can get her, and her paints, too," Carter said. "We've either got to get Daisy or get a snake charmer to make this snake hold still till we give it two good coats of paint. We're never going to get this snake painted, Joe. Not that I care a durn. I never had any ambition to paint snakes, anyway. It's your snake, and it's your loss if those strawberries don't get picked."

Half an hour later Joe's car stopped before the Walters' house and Joe rang the doorbell. It was Daisy herself who opened the door, and when she saw Joe her face brightened with pleasure and surprise.

"Why, Joe!" she exclaimed. "Joe!"

Ten minutes after that, smiling happily, she was gathering together her paint tubes and brushes and palette.

"But, of course, I can paint some bands on a board," she was saying, "and you can show me which is most like the way the coral snake is banded, and which is most like the color. It's lucky I'm not afraid of snakes. If you and Mr. Carter can just hold the snake quiet enough—"

She stopped short and looked at Joe and laughed.

"I've got it!" she said. "There's some chloroform up in the medicine

closet! Wait a minute, Joe. I'll be right down."

"And what if we give it too much?" Joe asked as they were on the way to the farm.

"Well, it will just be a dead snake, then," said Daisy. "It will be a dead coral snake instead of a live one, and we can't help that. I guess coral snakes die, don't they?"

But the milk snake did not die. Under the chloroform fumes it stretched out lifelessly, while Daisy painted it in brilliant bands of black and red and yellow, and if it was a little more brilliantly gaudy than any coral snake had ever been before, no one cared. It lay lazily motionless while the paint dried, but the next morning it was weaving to and fro in the box on the stump when the pickers came out from town. They stopped before the box to exclaim over it, and to warn each other to be careful.

In good time all Joe's strawberries were picked, and the professor returned from Tilliman's Swamp. He had not found the Venus's flytrap, but he had found a new giant sundew that amply compensated him. And there was his rare coral snake—but perhaps he would not have minded if he had known that a hawk had made a meal

of his *Elaps fulvius*, which to the rapacious bird was only another reptile.

When Joe carried him in the light truck to the station, with his many trunks and boxes, the professor carried on his lap a box carefully wrapped in paper and securely corded. It contained the gaudiest milk snake that ever took a railway journey.

On the way back to the farm Joe Turner stopped at Daisy Walters's house. He stopped there as often as he could now, because Daisy was going to the city to learn something about painting before she and Joe were married. Joe told her that the professor had taken the redecorated snake with him, and they laughed, and wondered what he would think when he began to study it.

"He'll be surprised," Joe said. "I shouldn't wonder if he wrote a book saying that coral snakes turn into milk snakes when they come North. But you did me a good turn, Daisy, that's sure."

"And myself, too, didn't I, Joe?" she asked. "And you do think I can paint a little, now, don't you? Because even if the cows I paint look like pigs, the snakes I paint don't look like pigs, do they, Joe?"

"No," said Joe frankly, "they don't."

A HALF-BURNED HOUSE SPEAKS

I AM so sick; they should have let me burn;
Let the full purging fire lay these walls
That once rang gay with little children's calls,
And knew the sweet scars of their unconcern.

Within these walls love died; disloyalty
Sent its slow poisonous trickle through my bones;
Dyed with its quarrel-stains my wood and stones,
While many a small betrayal weakened me.

Strange men are nailing dreams to my remains;
How can I let them know that I am rotten
With the decay of small faith now forgotten?
Can they not smell these yellow quarrel-stains?

Let them take care! A sick thing is not good;
I'll send a curse into their new, clean wood!

Mella Russell McCallum

The Amulet

*Those Who Hunt Among
the Wild Mountains of the
Central Asian Highlands
Must Be Men Who Fear
Neither Hardship Nor Peril*

By Don Cameron Shafer



HERE is no meat!" the woman complained, as she straightened up from a brass-bound, leather-covered wooden chest, in the dim light of the family

hut. "And the barley meal is almost gone," she added in a low voice.

Famine speaks with many tongues and to all people, but the man seated on an old sheepskin before the tiny fire, smoking a long-stemmed Chinese brass pipe, was not terrified by his wife's words, nor even astounded.

"One would think, woman, to hear you talk," said he, "that you never had seen the bottoms of those food chests before!"

"Aye, so many times—and now again!"

The only surprise was that famine had come to them quite so soon, hunger never being very far away from these people, summer or winter. It was to be expected, living as they did

in a country of famine—a bleak, starved, and worn-out land, almost desert, where mountains of bare rock reared up and ever upward to eternal snows; where wind-swept valleys and wide plains were but drifted sand, without trees, without vegetation, without tillable soil.

"I do not complain for myself," the woman said. "I was thinking of our little man."

Beside her, on a pile of skins, a small boy lay sleeping, with one bare brown arm outthrust, even though the cold morning air in the hut was near to freezing.

"You have never had to wear out our cooking pots by scraping them," said the man. "I can sell the horses over the mountain to the Bahiks for more barley."

"That possibility the gods deny us," answered the woman. "The pass is

closed for the winter. Not even the mail runners from Kara-Buran can get through. We may have to eat the horses, if those hungry leopards do not get them first; but certainly you cannot barter them for food now."

"It is fortunate, my woman," laughed he, in the very face of famine, "that you did not marry a herder of camels, or one of those simples who carry water all summer for a melon plant! I am a mountain man, a hunter of big game, and I have a most excellent gun. I will go up into the mountains and get some wild meat!"

"There is white winter famine in the mountains, too," she told him. "There is no game up there, with the snow so deep and the cold so intense, else those big white cats would not be prowling around our house nearly every night."

"There have always been fat sheep in these mountains," said he firmly. "I shall take my gun and prove it!"

Of all lands capable of sustaining human life this Central Asian plateau was the most forlorn and hopelessly desolate. It was old, old—naught but the parched and unburied bones of an outworn world. The lofty white ridges of the mountains lay on the wind-swept desert floor like the bleached vertebrae of some gigantic beast long since dead. Against the greenish blue of the cold winter sky rose a snow-capped range, over which, in the short summer only, these hardy and primitive people had touch with an almost legendary and unknown civilization.

In the winter everything was frozen, and the land was lashed by bitter winds and buried deep beneath ice and snow. During the hot, dry summer the sun burned it, the very rocks grew hot, and over the blistering sands the shimmering heat waves danced. Streams born of melting snow in the mountains gathered into swollen rivers, only to vanish completely in the thirsty sands of immeasurable deserts—rivers that never reached the sea.

There was not a tree in all that vast landscape, only here and there a thicket of low bushes, armed with thorns, and scattered patches of coarse grass, sufficient to support a few bands of both domestic and wild sheep, a few desert antelope, and a horse or two. There were no cities or even villages—only here and there a few scattered families, living in huts of felt, struggling to keep alive.

"Do not be anxious about food, for I have the best gun of any in these parts," spoke the man in a reassuring tone. "It is the strongest-shooting, the most accurate and reliable of all guns, and I will take it and get some wild meat."

A thin, wiry man, with unusual strength begot by the constant struggle to live, he was a survivor of some prehistoric race—an ancient Mongol tribe, dark-skinned, dark-eyed, black-haired, and yet thin-lipped and straight of nose. He was dressed in a long coat of brown-gray marmot skins, reaching to his knees and belted at the middle. Beneath this, although it was midwinter, there was nothing but his smooth, dark skin. He wore felt breeches, hardly more than twin bags, stuffed into soft skin boots, with a square of white woolen cloth wrapped about each foot in place of a stocking.

"I will bring the gun!"

Awakened by their voices, a lad of nine years had leaped out of the sleeping robes with all a small boy's eagerness for guns and hunting.

"Have care!" exclaimed the father, as his son dragged the heavy weapon from behind chests and bundles. "That is a very wonderful gun—do not injure it!"

"It is the finest gun in the world!" cried the boy proudly. "And I am big enough to shoot it—with a little help!"

II

THE real wonder of this gun was its marvelous antiquity. Apparently

its own grandfather had been merely a hollow tube of ironbound wood, from which weak black powder hurled smooth stones at mounted Tartar archers and charging Mongol spearmen. It had a long barrel, evidently hand forged, and roughly bored to take a huge hammered slug of soft lead. The wooden stock was almost straight, and was fastened to the barrel with heavy brass sleeves. The lock was a simple match—a long coil of slow-burning rope, which, when the hunter was ready to fire, was brought down against the powder in the firing pan by the crudest kind of unguarded trigger and lock arrangement.

The gun was so long and so heavy that it could not be fired at arm's length. It was provided with a forked iron rest, hinged near the muzzle, designed to be placed firmly upon the ground to steady the barrel while the hunter aimed and fired from a prone position.

"Father, let me go with you!" begged the boy.

"Old Man Mountain is not for boys in the winter."

"I could ride one of the horses!"

"No horse could climb up to where the wild sheep live."

"Then I could go behind you on the yak!"

"Cold would get you and turn you into a stone; or wind would puff you away—*p-s-s-t-t-t-t*—like that!"

The tiny hut was like a great felt hat. Its frame was a latticework of light wood, imported from distant villages where there still was wood to work, and covered with long strips of heavy felt made from yak and camel hair. It was perhaps fourteen feet in diameter, and not more than nine feet high in the center. The outer walls were weighted down with stones, to keep it from blowing away entirely.

In the center burned a dull and feeble fire of dried yak dung, never sufficient to warm or light the interior; but over it water was heated for tea

and food was cooked—when there was food. The few belongings of the family, packed in chests and bundles, as is the habit of nomad people, were stacked along the circular wall, out of the way. A few sheepskins made their simple bed.

Often enough at night, when half famished wolves and leopards prowled outside in the dark, hungry and desperate, it was necessary to bring the hardy mountain ponies and the still harder yak into the hut, where the body heat of the animals helped to keep the human inmates warm. So now, to one side facing the wall, stood two woolly brown ponies, and beside them a great shaggy, oxlike beast.

"I will ride the yak," said the man. "You, my son, must drive the horses to the north ridge, where the wind blows away the snow, so that they can find some dried grass to eat."

The boy's thin lips quivered a little, and his dark eyes glistened with moisture. He was visibly disappointed, but he stood straight and was a man.

"Give me the slugs and the bag of powder to feed the gun," commanded the father; "also the driest match rope, and a box of fire sticks to light it with when I am ready to kill a big fat sheep."

The boy leaped to bring these treasured and most interesting things, while the woman tied warm mittens to the sleeves of her man's skin coat, so that they might not be blown away when he drew them off to shoot.

"Now I am ready," he laughed, and started out. "Put your largest kettle on the fire!"

"Wait!" cried the woman. "You have forgotten your amulet."

"*Hei, hei!* I do not need any good luck charm when I have this wonderful gun," he answered.

"Don't dare go hunting without it," she warned him, hastily searching the while. "You will not find the sheep."

"You delay me with such foolishness," he protested.

"Wait—it will bring you luck!"

"Womanish fancies! That old amulet has nothing to do with luck, good or bad."

"You never believe anything," she accused. "At any rate, it will do no harm to wear it. See, I have made a new strap for it."

"Well," he weakened, "to please you—"

He had no faith in charms, and yet, anxious to go, he stopped and held out his left hand.

"No, the right—the lucky side," she insisted.

Laughing at her simple superstitions, he stood there while she buckled upon his right wrist a strong, new leather strap. To this was fastened a round disk of brass with a glass crystal, beneath which was a tiny piece of paper bearing a single Chinese character inscribed in India ink and signifying good luck.

"The new strap is a bit too large," said she, "but it will not slip off. It will bring us luck—and meat!"

"You women believe everything!"

"You shall see," she smiled. "Without it you might not even return to us!"

III

It was a fine winter morning for hunting. All those that lived by fang and claw were out, as well as this man with his gun. The usual arctic gales, sweeping down out of the north, for once were still. The last storm had blown away the snow clouds, leaving the morning sky clear and cold.

High up in the frigid blue overhead a great golden eagle swung on tireless wings, peering down, down, with bright jewel eyes, searching for motionless hares crouching in their forms among the wind-swept rocks. A pair of red foxes were stalking a small covey of hardy grouse where the snow had been swept from a grassy knoll. A white ermine with gory cheeks was flashing in and out of a maze of mice

tunnels in the snow. High up against the bleak and threatening mountain two gaunt gray wolves crouched in the snow, watching a band of ibex feeding along the rough and broken face of a cliff, hoping that some luckless individual would stray out upon a level bench where they could dash in and pull it down.

The Turkoman hunter with his ancient gun mounted the patient yak, a strange and grotesque beast, and yet one well fitted for that hard country. It was somewhat like the American bison, though not so large, and in some respects it resembled the arctic musk ox. Its sides were covered with thick wool and long dark hair reaching well below its bony knees. It was inured to hardship, impervious to cold, and born to steep mountain trails.

The hunter sat in a crude homemade saddle and controlled his mount with a string fastened through the cartilage of its black nose. There was no road. The man jerked the beast about until it was facing the highest mountain, and kicked it in the ribs with his heels.

"Up, up!" he cried. "I must save my breath for the hunt when we find the sheep!"

No other saddle animal could have accomplished such a task. With all the sure-footedness of a mountain goat, and all the strength of an ox, the yak wallowed through the deep snow and clambered over the rocks, higher and higher, searching out a way along the steepest cliffs. The strange beast grunted and groaned with every step, and almost burst its lungs with each panting breath in the thin, cold air. Clouds of white steam puffed from its open mouth and nostrils, as if it were driven by some powerful internal engine.

It seemed as if with every new ascent the yak must drop dead, but always it went on, up and on, bearing the hunter on its broad back to the wind-swept heights above, where the wild sheep find scant pasturage—barely suf-

ficient to maintain them through the long winter—and protection from their natural enemies.

Not even the great golden eagle riding the upper air had better eyesight than the Turkoman hunter, whose dark eyes were almost telescopic in their vision. As he rode, he searched every ridge and mountainside for feeding or resting sheep.

At length, far off in the dim and hazy distance, he made out several faint and shadowy objects against the rock-studded ice and snow. Instantly he recognized a small band of Marco Polo sheep—big, upstanding, long-legged, heavy-horned wild creatures, grazing from one bunch of dried grass to another in their quest for nourishment. These big animals, among the very largest of the sheep family, for all their size are shy and timid creatures, hunted by man, by wolves, and by that greatest killer of all, the great snow leopard of mountainous Asia.

"Good luck and bad ride together this morning!" exclaimed the hunter, as he watched the sheep. "They are seven, which is good—the lucky number; but also they are on the very steepest side of old Skytoucher, and that is altogether bad."

The mountain was fitly named—a great mass of jagged rock, reaching to the very skies, covered with huge masses of ice and drifted snow, broken by towering cliffs, deep cañons, and steep slides.

"They have gone to that almost impossible place," guessed the man, "because the hoary wolves and the white cats are also hungry."

To reach this band of sheep in their haven of refuge the hunter must detour and climb for hours, making the best of a very difficult stalk to approach near enough for a successful shot with his ancient gun; but this was the only kind of hunting he knew, and he was a mountain man to climb with any sheep.

When he could ride no farther, he

tied the patient yak to a rock, shouldered his heavy gun, and began the stalk. For hours he toiled, up and ever up, through drifted snow breast deep, up rocky walls that did not seem passable at all, edging across steep and glary ice fields, where a slip meant death. Some of the icy walls he climbed by cutting steps with his big skinning knife.

Once a long tongue of snow started to move beneath his feet, but he leaped away to safety, cursing his bad luck, certain that he had started a snow slide that would end in an avalanche and startle the feeding game. By good luck—was it due to the charm upon his wrist?—hidden rock ridges beneath the snow stopped the slide before it got much of a start.

"Good!" exclaimed the hunter. "Perhaps the amulet will bring me luck, after all!"

The sheep were not so far away now, and the Turkoman had to take advantage of every bit of cover to avoid being seen. A single unguarded movement of his dark figure on the white snow, and the keen-eyed animals would go stampeding away to the safety of the heights above. Sweat poured from him, even in that intense cold. The air became thinner, his breath panting and rasping.

At last he reached a big rock that he had marked mentally as being very near the sheep. Anxiously, and yet very cautiously, he peered out to see if by any mistake of his own, or any mischance, they had seen him approaching and had fled.

All unsuspecting, the big sheep had stopped to rest, kneeling in the snow. Several large rams had their massive heads outstretched before them, to rest the weight of their great curved horns. Atop a convenient rock an old ewe knelt, her jaws wagging, her big yellow eyes searching in all directions for any sign of danger.

"It is farther than I thought," the hunter said, disappointed. "They are

still two shots away. I must manage somehow to get closer!"

IV

ACROSS a snow-filled hollow, high above, raced a ghostly shadow. It was as if a thin white cloud had drifted across the face of the sun, or the wind had lifted a bit of snow and sent it dancing over the white surface. It was no more than a moving shadow, a ghostly form, hardly visible unless the sharpest eyes were fixed exactly upon the spot.

Then, over the white crest of a snow bank, appeared two large, greenish yellow eyes, gleaming with pale phosphorescent light, looking hungrily down upon the resting sheep. Swinging a thousand feet above, the golden eagle, with his microscopic eyesight, picked out the graceful outline of this white figure upon the white snow. It was the most beautiful carnivorous animal in the world—the snowy leopard of the high Asiatic mountains.

The long, soft fur of this great cat is almost as white as snow, faintly mottled with the characteristic leopard spots in the most delicate shade of cream, so as to be visible only at close range. The leopards are the most graceful, the most powerful for their size, the cleverest hunters, and the most dangerous killers of all the cat family; and this white hunter of the snow-covered heights is no exception. The very nature of its limited range, and the struggle that it must wage to live there at all, make it a formidable foe to all forms of animal life.

In the winter famine, under the protection of darkness, it will raid the very doors of the native huts, to kill the dogs, the ponies, and the family yaks if they are carelessly left outdoors. Then it is not safe for man or woman to be abroad at night. The big cats seem to know that the mountain dwellers have no effective weapon against a charge driven swiftly home, and many of them are man-eaters

whenever they get a chance.

The leopard watched the feeding sheep until it was satisfied that there was a chance for a successful stalk. Blending almost to invisibility against the snowy background, running swiftly on its broad feet over the soft and yielding surface, it sped forward boldly in the open, without any attempt at concealment, trusting entirely to its protective coat not to be seen by the keen-eyed sheep at that distance. It was not as large as the Asiatic tiger, or as heavy as the African lion, but it made up in agile strength and hunger-driven ferocity what it lacked in size and weight. It was big enough to pull down a horse, or to kill the largest yak, and man would be a weak and helpless thing against its ripping claws and gleaming ivory teeth.

It ran easily and smoothly over the white snow, graceful and tireless, hungry and relentless. In its circuitous route far above it did not cross the trail of the Turkoman climbing up from below, and did not suspect that there was another hunter stealing toward this same band of sheep.

V

THE big sheep had selected what they considered a safe place for their midday rest. They were kneeling on a snow-covered field of ice, steeper than a house roof, through which projected a few dark rocks, offering little cover for any hunter, man or beast. Behind them, within a little distance, the mountain rose to new heights in a ragged cliff of solid rock, seemingly impassable, but up which these sure-footed creatures knew a tortuous and dangerous route where no predatory beast could climb. If the watching ewe, sniffing at the cold air, showed any sign of alarm, all would leap away to this near-by haven of refuge.

The Turkoman hunter read all this with swift appraising eye. The final stalk would be both difficult and dangerous. There were uptilted sheets of

slippery ice to cross and deep snow to wallow through, where a single mishap might easily cost him his life; but he was familiar with such dangers, and was as fearless and sure-footed as any ibex. He did not hesitate to attempt the distance necessary for a successful shot. There were a woman and a child in the hut down below, waiting for food!

He began working his way rapidly along toward the unsuspecting sheep, taking advantage of every little hollow, each protruding rock. Once it was necessary to furrow his way through a sizable snow bank, digging with his mittened hands to form a concealing trench.

At last he gained the shelter of a large rock, only to discover that he was still too far away to shoot, and that before him was a thirty-foot stretch of snow-covered ice that must be crossed in plain sight of the watching ewe. He realized that in his dark clothing, so readily visible against the white snow, his first forward move would send the game racing away up the mountain. For a time he lay peeping out, his mind busy with the problem.

"Of what use is a man's head," he chuckled, "if not to help him in such a situation as this?"

He looked down at the amulet, and an idea came. It was almost as if the charm had spoken, as pieces of paper can speak to some men.

Pulling off one boot, he unwrapped the square of white woolen cloth from his foot, and replaced the boot. He extracted the soft iron ramrod from its sleeves beneath the gun barrel and bent it into a rough circle, to which he fastened the white cloth, sail fashion, with bits of string. It was like a small shield of white. By pushing it along before him on the snow, ever so slowly, and wriggling along prone behind it, he was able to work across the open space to the shelter of a wind-hollowed snow bank without being discovered

by the drowsy sheep.

Now he was within good range, and safely hidden. The thrill of the hunt was hard upon him. With difficulty he steadied his trembling hands to make ready the primitive gun. He loosened the iron rest near the muzzle, lighted the slow match, and primed the pan. Thrusting the heavy weapon out before him, he crawled toward the rim of snow, praying that the wind might not shift and carry his scent to the game before he could shoot.

In his excitement he hardly noticed the precariousness of his position, and almost forgot his own safety. The snow whereon he lay was uptilted to a dangerous angle, though soft enough on the surface for him to work along its steep face in comparative security. He had only a few feet to go now. He bound the white cloth over his black head, to disguise it so that he could raise it sufficiently to sight the gun.

At this crisis of his long and arduous stalk the hunter did not know that he, too, was being hunted.

VI

THE snow leopard gained a sheltering rock, and for a few seconds it lay there, panting for breath after its hard run in that thin air. Its protruding tongue and open mouth showed coral pink, the steam of its hot breath rose like mist, and the end of its long tail twitched nervously. Presently it cautiously raised its massive head to see if the sheep were still there.

The broad head jerked down again, the beast's ears flattened, and a shudder of inherent terror flashed through its vitals. It looked out again to see, crawling over the snow, the dark figure of a man.

Old feuds, old hatreds, welled up within, to the accompaniment of a low and dangerous rumble in the leopard's heavy white throat. Its yellow eyes blazed with commingled rage and fear. Man, dreaded by day, despised at night, crawling along as if wounded!

Cautiously the hungry leopard looked once more, and gathered courage, knowing that the man had not seen him, and could not see him at that distance. The yellow eyes grew wider and wider, and a fearsome fire burned deep within their amber depth—a glow like phosphorus rubbed in the dark. The slavering pink lips parted over red gums, lifted snarling over ivory teeth in noiseless menace, and emitted a faint feline hiss of expelled breath.

Despite its all but invisible coat, the big cat knew that these mountain sheep are very difficult to stalk. It realized only too well, after many fruitless hunts, that the strong odor of its warm body blew far with every vagrant breath of air, advertising its presence to all keen-nosed creatures. The faintest tinge of feline scent in the air, and the sheep would be gone, running faster than the leopard could run, climbing where it could not climb.

But this man, this hunter sprawling in the snow—it could see now that the man was not wounded, but was crawling along toward the unsuspecting sheep—this man creature could not even scent a leopard, could not run or climb away from it, could not even see it. Man is always the easiest to hunt of all large game, and makes the least resistance when caught. The noisy old gun was not even as dangerous as the sharp horns of a big ram.

Hunger drives fear, continued famine begets courage. The big cat abandoned all thought of the sheep, and began to stalk the man.

Bounding across an intervening hollow, wriggling over exposed snow patches, crawling swiftly behind every bit of cover, the leopard easily gained the shelter of the large rock where the man had made his screen of white cloth, behind which he had edged slowly across the open snow. Here it halted, while its eyes narrowed to glistening opal slits and its lips wrinkled to a snarling grimace. It lacked the courage to crawl up behind the man, for it

feared the noisy gun, now in plain sight.

The Turkoman was intent upon his game, almost ready to shoot. Fearing that he might look back in time, the big cat decided to give up the stalk and charge. Three long leaps, and it would be upon the man before he could get up, even before he could turn around with his heavy gun.

Out of the soft white paws appeared glistening ivory claws, sharp as knives, curving down to grip firmly in the hard ice. Every driving muscle in the powerful legs and lithe body writhed into place and set for the first long leap. Powerful jaws fell slightly agape, wet lips were raised out of the way of the murderous sharp teeth. Then, like a white stone from a giant catapult, the great cat's body rose from the snow and launched forward into a thirty-foot leap.

VII

WHOOM! The heavy gun roared like a small cannon.

"Devils of misfortune!" cried the disappointed hunter. "And she calls that thing a good luck charm!"

Just as he was leveling the old gun, as he was moving his right hand back for the lock, the loose wrist strap of the amulet caught in the clumsy trigger and the burning match fell upon the powder in the pan, firing it prematurely into the air. Noise and streaming fire and belching smoke—the leaden slug whizzing harmlessly away—the startled sheep leaping to mad flight and safety.

When the heavy explosion shook the still air of the mountainside, the charging leopard was in the very middle of its second long leap. Unable to stop, it struck the ground about twenty feet behind the raging hunter. Having heard the thunder of guns before—fired from the natives' doors into the darkness, where ponies were squealing and yaks bellowing in fear—the big cat did not hesitate because of this, but

launched itself instantly into the final spring of death.

In that same two seconds the hunter, cursing his bad luck, and reaching to draw off the amulet and throw it away in disgust, suddenly felt the snow beneath him slip away into space. As he fell with it, a great white, snarling beast struck the very spot where he had lain just before the slide started.

The explosion and jar of the old gun had loosened the snow field, balanced against the icy steep, and now the whole mass, with man and beast, was coasting swiftly down the mountain toward the edge of a lofty cliff. It flashed through the man's head that what he was cursing as grievous misfortune had been good luck, after all. Had not the strap caught the trigger just as it did, and fired the gun, the striking leopard would have killed him almost instantly.

But this gift of life was short. He felt himself going, riding an avalanche of death.

"God of luck!" he cried. "Help me now!"

The frightened man saw the terrified leopard, its broad pads like snowshoes, bounding swiftly across the moving mass to safety. He tried to run, to leap, to crawl, but the boiling, yielding snow beneath his feet rose up to engulf him, to trip him, to pull him down again. Faster and faster the snowy cataract flowed over the smooth ice toward the abyss below.

VIII

LIKE most snow avalanches, this one, in the beginning, was only a small triangle of drifted snow upon a smooth sheet of hard ice, sloping precipitously downward, and needing but a little more weight, or some sudden jar, to send it sliding away. Once started, the falling mass gathers speed and size as it descends, until it grows to be an irresistible river of snow and ice, hurling thousands of tons down the mountainside, tearing loose great rocks, and

finally roaring and crashing down into the hollow depths of the first cañon.

The hunter was almost at the peak of the snowy triangle when the slide started. He knew that his only hope for safety was to reach the edge of the moving field before it dropped over the cliff below him. He made a desperate effort, and nearly succeeded. Being hampered by the heavy gun, he swung it by the barrel and threw it far out to motionless snow. Then he made one last frantic attempt to reach the edge himself before the avalanche carried him to the death that was now so near.

The moving snow was like tossing water, offering no foothold, but catching his legs and feet, throwing him prone. He crawled, he rolled, his legs and arms thrusting, but he could not make it.

When but a few yards from safety, where the falling snow was thin and powder fine, sliding over smooth ice, he felt himself going over the cliff. He felt his feet go over, while his fingers gripped frantically at the smooth, hard ice, unable to check his swift descent. His struggling body followed. He closed his eyes, waiting for the sickening sensation of dropping through space and the thud of his own body on the rocks far below.

In that last second, as if some giant hand had suddenly reached down and seized him by the wrist, he stopped—swinging slowly back and forth in mid-air, with the snow pouring over him in a stream. Unable to realize just what miracle had happened, he hung there helplessly. In his ears was the roar of the avalanche booming on below.

Then he opened his eyes, and understanding came back. He realized that the loose leather strap of the wrist amulet had caught upon a little point of rock projecting up through the hard surface of the curved ice, on the very brink of the cliff.

His swinging feet touched nothing.

He looked down hundreds of feet below, and saw the powdery spume of snow thrown up by the avalanche. Nothing held him suspended there but his arm, bent over the smooth, icy lip of the cliff, held by the leather strap caught upon the spike of rock; and any struggle was likely to break either the rock or the strap.

IX

THUS for a few seconds the Turkoman hung, dangling between earth and sky, and knowing that no help was possible. No one knew where he was. There were no other hunters on those lonely heights. He had no neighbors. Left without him, his wife and son would perish in their foodless hut.

But this man, born to struggle for existence, was not one to give up. At his belt was his big hunting and skinning knife. With his left hand he drew it, and, reaching cautiously up as far as he could, began to chip a hand hold in the hard ice. When it was cut and notched to give a firm grip for his strong fingers, he held the knife in his teeth and tried it.

Locking the fingers of his left hand securely in this first cut, he drew himself up a little and unhooked the strap.

Then, with the knife, he made another hand hold several inches farther up the slope. Again he held the knife in his teeth as he tested the second notch. With both hands gripping, he rested for a moment, and then cut another notch, and another. At length he hauled his body slowly up until his knee was in the first notch.

"Never again," said he, "will I doubt the efficiency of my luck amulet!"

From this point it was easy enough. He chipped steps until he reached a rock frozen solidly in the ice, and from there he worked his way back to the hard snow. Circling about, he managed to recover his old gun.

Narrow escapes being common enough in his mountainous life, the hunter did not abandon his quest because of this accident. Confident that he was immune to any bad luck so long as he wore the amulet, he recharged his old gun and made ready to hunt again.

"That slide will frighten a cowardly leopard, but not a man," said he. "By cutting across over the ridge, I may be able to head off those sheep, and with such a powerful charm I can hardly help but get one!"

THE ROSE AND THE FOOL

A Rose there grew
Just over the way,
That nodded and smiled at me!
I, foolish as ever a Fool will be,
Looked at the Rose—
Then dully slept—
And in the night
That I dreamed away,
The Rose that had bloomed
So fair that day,
Was pinched by frost
And by the wind was swept.
I gathered its scattered leaves
Next day—
All into a little mound,
And wept!

Glenn Visscher

Man of the World

By Leslie Gordon Barnard



AN IMMENSE TENDERNESS FILLED FRANZ; IT TOOK IN ALL THE WORLD

This Youth Yearned to Make a Song About His Fair Lady's Charms, but Found He Lacked Experience to Strike the Right Note



WHEN he came out of the inn, Franz was conscious that they were laughing at him. And yet, he felt, they were secretly envious. The hot air of the tavern, the wine, the taunts of his companions, sent him with scarlet cheeks into the open air. It was an instant relief to get outside. Under a misty arc of sky a little wind blew to fan his cheeks.

Close by was a pump, and conveniently near, a basin, which he cleansed and filled with fresh cold water. Into this he dipped his hot head.

"Make yourself pretty, Franz! Tut! Tut! It will soon be dusk, and your pretty Parisienne will not be able to see if your neck is clean or not!"

That was Schrieber, the big bary-

tone, talking now, coming in from a walk, with his pipe for company. Schrieber, German all through, reminded Franz of some legendary figure from the Rhineland.

His face had been carved by life—an outrageous, exotic, rough-and-tumble life, if you could credit his own accounts—into deep furrows and ruts and lines; with a twist of his eyebrows and mustache, and a setting of his face, he could become the character he sang better than a score of his compeers with the last word in make-up! Schrieber gave himself airs; but no one denied him these.

He mingled with the traveling troupe, to which Franz also belonged, with a hearty condescension. When he chose to tell a tale, all others paled. When he boasted of his amours, the

eyes of the most hardened stood out, and their own pretensions became the weak things they were.

But when he sang there were some who dared say if it were not for his actions, his dramatic powers, he would get hisses rather than applause. It was whispered that this accounted for his throwing in his lot with a second-rate musical troupe, and putting up with the rigors of traveling from town to town, from fair to fair.

Franz, whose task it was to accompany Schrieber, among others, supported him loyally at the piano, but was often in despair. Nevertheless he respected Schrieber immensely. No other had yet had so powerful an influence in his life. Franz would sit drinking in his words; his experience seemed to know no boundary line of country, as his mind stopped at no limitation of subject.

He had been everywhere, and seen everything. With a breath of his mouth politicians and ecclesiastics toppled to the ground; he made and unmade kings; he sorted into rightful rank poets and priests, novelists and necromancers, singers and seducers. He was a man of the world, by his own consent. The phrase, to Franz, fitted. A man of the world! This he determined in his own heart to become.

"What a pity to spend such effort on a Parisienne!"

Franz, emerging now from a highly colored handkerchief doing duty as a towel, grinned, half sheepishly. Of course this was only Schrieber's manner of speaking. Other members of the company had shown racial animosity toward the soprano from Paris; they criticized her among themselves, not caring that they were overheard. It took Schrieber to put them straight.

"Art knows no boundaries," he declared almost ferociously. "A man of the world is above such pettiness, my friends!"

It was not until after she had slapped

his face for impertinent advances, and perhaps with some racial stirrings on her side, that he added: "Nevertheless it is a pity she mews like a cat. A soprano must be good, or not at all!"

This judgment was delivered with a sense of values weighed, and judicially appraised. Those who heard and approved the saying could not know the avoirdupois of that secret slap! Franz did not hear this. It is possible Schrieber was careful on that point.

Even for a man of the world it is something to have the open admiration of a lad in his teens.

Schrieber came over now, and stood by the pump, until the drying process was completed, and Franz's face shone. A pudgy, big hand touched the highly polished surface. "A dusting of powder," said Schrieber critically. "They like them smooth that way, rather than—eh—so high a polish. Come to my room, and I'll fix you!"

Franz obeyed. The rooms of the inn were poor, but Schrieber had managed the best of them. Innkeepers took him for a personage. Even waiters accomplished the most amazing things for him on the most minute tips, given with an air that clearly said:

"This is no tip at all. As men of the world you and I know what's what in tipping. For the moment, however, I am out of change, but next time—" If one moves about often enough this is workable! So Schrieber's room impressed Franz, and he stood and received his powder as an acolyte might incense!

A framed picture on the dresser caught Franz's eye, and set his heart leaping.

"Yes, you are correct!" said Schrieber. "That is the Opera House, in Paris! The signature in the corner is that of the"—he coughed—"the manager, souvenir of my singing there some years ago!"

"It must be wonderful—" said Franz dreamily.

"It was!" assented Schrieber quick-

ly. "Critics declared my interpretation of—"

"I mean," said Franz, "to go to the opera. To hear what one would hear there! I should like to see Paris! To be so near as this—"

"Paris is well enough," declared Schrieber gruffly. "For myself there are other cities. Now a little of this on your hair. No? Ah, well, perhaps she will prefer it ruffled, *hien?*"

Franz blushed. Outside, soft dusk was beginning to fall, and he must hurry. He gave awkward enough thanks and turned to go. Schrieber, watching him, halted him suddenly. He came over and caught Franz's arm again. Something almost fatherly was in his eye.

"Be careful, Franz, of these women. They are deceivers, *hien?* A woman, and a Parisienne. I should watch myself!" One big eyelid, however, fell at this moment in a prodigious wink. To Franz it was the signal of one man of the world to another.

He went out, much gratified. But once outside, some larger power erased this impression. Soft darkness, under a misty sky, a clear, shivering evening light still lingered in crystal pools of color. And beyond was the poplar bordered canal, by which he had promised to meet her.

II

OUT of the dusky shadow her voice surprised him, sending a little shiver down his spine.

"So you have not failed me? Ah, no! Come and sit by me!"

To do so, Franz must change the angle of his view. Instantly he was halted. She did not appear to notice this, though her eyelids quivered with a movement he could not see.

She had seated herself on a stump. Upon the darkling waters of the canal the late light had thrown a reflection from a cloud. Against this she was silhouetted, her head turned slightly from him, and drooping as gracefully

as the dusky willow above her.

Her dress of severe black set off the charms of an ivory complexion. The kindly dusk had softened lines that in daylight were with difficulty prevented from being hard. Franz found her beautiful: that her age should be greater than his only increased his sense of awe and wonder.

"Come, are you not going to sit beside me, so?"

Her voice was musical, much more than when she sang, the musician in Franz admitted. And yet it was some quality in her singing which first attracted him: in the midst of mediocrity, when he would be accompanying her, he would be almost startled by it, a purity, an emotion, lost immediately again in mediocrity.

Often as she spoke he would seize upon a phrase, and tears would spring to his eyes. In her speech she had a pretty, baffling, wonder-working trick of rattling on in wisps of language, now German, now English, now her own native French. A woman of the world! A cosmopolitan. He was enchanted. He was entranced.

He dreamed of her by night. It seemed that her coming had wiped out all the past. That he must always have known her, not merely for these comparatively few days.

She drew her carefully spread skirts aside, and he sat down. The willow stump was not wide. The darkening world spun about him.

"I am very unhappy!" she sighed.

"No! No! You must not be. I shall write a song about you, for you!"

Her eyes turned slowly upon him. Mlle. Verenay had eyes, and a good command of them.

"How many women have you promised that before, my friend?"

His world ceased its dizzy spinning. She had brought him back as surely as if she had shocked him with cold water. The past that her coming had wiped from the slate sprang at him.

All the night noises, all the night

scents, carried him away. The dank, cool smell of water, in which rushes grow rankly, brought back the stream that ran beside his home.

Nights, when his father was away, and his mother was beyond fear of his harsh tongue, he would sit by the stream, and in the pollarded poplars the winds would blow as they did, gently rustling, through the willows here. And she would sing, lifting her face as if, indeed, she heard their voices:

"Blow, little wind in the trees by my house,
Blow, little wind, blow—"

Once her voice had broken there. His hand, feeling for her face in the dark, had surprised tears.

"Tell me of places I never can see,
Never can go!"

When she finished, Franz, the impulsive, had thrown himself upon her. "You shan't sing it!" he cried. "It makes you cry. I'll write you one myself some day, mama. Some day I'll write you a song all your own!"

He wondered where she was now. And if to run away with another man is worse or better than living with a critical husband.

A hand touched his.

"You are very quiet? And you haven't answered."

"I am thinking!"

That was true. But it was of Sylva now. Sylva who lived in the little town where Breede, the organist, tutored Franz's ready fingers. There was to be a song called "Sylva," he was to make them both famous, he was to make a career, and return—two years?—three years ago?

"How many there must be, my friend, to whom you promised songs. It makes the honor less—" Her eyebrows arched.

He did not speak. She hurried on!

"But what a past you must have had? So? Then we are on even terms! And we are wise enough, my friend, to know that life moves on!"

His past! Franz made a grimace in the darkness. When you considered Schrieber, how flat it fell. At thought of Schrieber, tenderness for his own mild past fell from him. But the girl's words flattered him. So might one speak to a man of the world. Life moves on! That sounded gallant. Such a thing might Schrieber say. "When the old torch burns low, light a new one!" That was Schrieber for you, Schrieber's own words.

"Schrieber says—" Franz began.

"That man! Pooh. A bluff! I hate him. I hate all the company. They have been horrid to me. I should have left—but for you!"

Her hand tightened on his.

"Come. Shall we walk while there is time? Before the stupid performance at the Kursaal must begin!"

He fell into step beside her. Her arm was linked into his. He felt immensely old and wise, and flattered, to walk thus with a woman of the world.

III

"You know it is waste here, this traveling around, these ordinary people," she said. "Paris is the place for you!"

He did not speak. He felt lifted above it. They moved on through the many scented night. She began to speak to him of Paris. From his mother, who was English and had been a governess in Paris, he had learned much; familiar names of streets and places stirred in him a sense of romance.

"You should have modest lodgings. Two rooms, or even one, with a piano by the window, and a glimpse of the Seine from it!"

"How should I live?"

"You would give lessons. And, by and by, you would compose great things, and become famous!"

Ecstatic tears stirred in his eyes.

"A bed," said Mlle. Verenay. "One of those affairs that becomes, by day, a sofa. Pupils may come where there

is a sofa, but not a bed. As for meals, one corner screened off for lesser occasions, and dinner taken out. One may dine cheaply, with wine, if one knows the right places! I could take you—"

"Ah, if you were only there!"

"But, of course! And you would be surprised how I can cook. And there is always the *pâtisserie* around the corner if one grows tired. While you worked I could run out and fetch the things!"

His world swam again: the dim stars above rocketing through a misty sky, the dark pattern of the earth quivering with an ecstatic aura, night midges dancing with increased momentum before his face, night scents from growing things at his feet moving up, as if all the cosmic forces, prisoned in the soil by day, were now released to stir desire, and passion, and ambition, until the heart and brain whirled with a thousand inexpressible hopes.

"I should be very quiet while you worked. Sewing, perhaps, or reading, or setting our little place in order. By rights it should be under the roof, with a slope to the ceiling to break the lines, and dormer windows to look across the gray and green of Paris. Ah, we shall be very happy! To help you give time to composition, I may take an engagement now and then, singing."

No! Not that! He negatived it with an awkward but decisive gesture. Here, under the swarming stars, she was perfect; but on the platform—

Suddenly he slapped his thigh.

"The Kursaal!" he said. "It must be getting time!"

She consulted a little watch, and shrugged her shoulders.

"Yes, we must go!" Her feet did not keep pace with his. "Have you no—kiss—for me?"

He swung about abruptly. He could scarcely see her in the darkness, but what he saw possessed a slim and gracious beauty. Yet it was not that which

made him stride back, and catch her by the shoulder, with a maturity that made his age leap to hers, and beyond.

"Say that again!"

She was startled.

He reiterated: "Say that—again!"

"Have you—no—kiss—"

"Not that way! Not that way! As you said it before!"

She was pale ivory now, half stunned. She was silent. Franz let the silence grow, as if he knew that from the earth, perhaps, the cosmic forces that drove men on, that broke men's hearts, would rise.

"Have you—no—kiss—for me?"

He caught her to him, and kissed her. His awe of her was for the moment gone. His need of her was less than her need of him. He saw himself, at a piano under a slanting roof, with a window over Paris. And there, somehow, he would catch and preserve beauty from mediocrity, and when she sang the hearts of men would break.

IV

THE members of the company were all at the Kursaal, waiting. The audience was also in the Kursaal, waiting. "Where is Franz? Where is that young fool, Franz?" The manager, the impresario, had long hair, and he tore at it now, being careful not to hurt himself in the accomplishment of this temperamental feat.

The women were there, the other women, giggling and simpering nervously, and whispering such things as women will where another of the sex is concerned. The men were there, strutting a little, as men will when they are at a crisis, and imagine something is to be gained by appearing active.

Schrieber was there, a little apart, amazing in his costume as Escamillo, and looking as sure of himself as Escamillo should, only his pudgy hands by persistent nervous pluckings showing any breach in his supreme confidence.

His fingers snapped above his head.

"*Demi mondaine!*" he said. "*Demi mondaine!*" He made the thing international by repeating the epithet in such forms as may be found in many parts of the world. "The boy is a fool!" declared Schrieber. "An adventuress. A pretty moll. A *demi mondaine*—a—ah!"

Outside, the sudden stamping applause of a popular crowd with a performance unpopularity late. Here, behind the scenes, a silence, broken only by a suppressed simper.

Mlle. Verenay had crossed the threshold before they saw her! Franz was immediately behind. He looked now merely an awkward boy. He was very pale. His eyes were wide. His arms seemed too long for his sleeves; his sensitive fingers were clenched. He took a step forward, the red beginning to mount into his face, but Verenay swept him aside with her arm.

The impresario, rushing madly from an agitated peep at the discontented audience, tore his hair again, this time apparently without regard to the roots. But when he dashed forward, a torrent of recriminations and pleadings bubbling on his lips, *mademoiselle* swept him aside again. She faced the abashed Schrieber, the shrinking Escamillo. Her glance took in the half frightened, half simpering women, the openly delighted men.

She threw up her head, defiantly, gesturing comprehensively with her hands.

"*Canaille!*"

Franz quivered with the magnificence of it. She moved toward Schrieber now; the gallant Escamillo took a step backward, but the wall was behind him. He lifted an arm to ward her off, but she was too quick for him. The slap resounded through the place. Schrieber tottered back, and in Franz's heart fell from a pinnacle. Ah, but she was magnificent! Some day he would set such a scene for her—to music!

"*Canaille!* I am through. I return

to-night to Paris!"

She swept them all again.

"Go!" roared the impresario, moved to sudden courage by the sound of the audience waiting outside. "Go! But without pay. Go to your Paris! Go to your streets! Bah! Come, Franz, be quick! Get on there—"

Franz was white again. If he could only rise to this. There was Schrieber, man of the world, a punctured Escamillo, feeling his face still by the wall. There were the now cowed company.

"I, also, am through!" said Franz. His voice was shaking; tears threatened his eyes. Why must he be weak when such a chance was at hand? "I, too, am going to Paris!"

Mademoiselle had already swept from the place. He turned and followed, but somehow his going broke the tension. Some one laughed. Tears of anger sprang to Franz's eyes. They laughed because they thought him a silly boy.

But he would show them. Let the performance get along without him. Let his understudy at the piano, who was a fat mediocrity, go on with the orchestra. Some one was calling Schrieber to go on and get things started. But Escamillo was panting behind Franz.

"You fool! You little fool. A *demi mondaine!*"

Franz turned, an ugly word on his lips.

Schrieber stopped short.

"Very good!" he said abruptly. "Be a fool!"

He was gone. Franz could hear him presently singing. Poor Schrieber with his pretensions. Listen to his voice! All bluff! Wind and noise! What could a person like Schrieber know of the thousand inexpressible hopes that lured a finer mind? Franz must hurry to arrange matters: to pack; to count his money; to consult a time-table.

Schrieber was through. There was applause, and he was on again. Wind

and noise! Schrieber! Schrieber! Schrieber! Why did the man stick in his mind? It is hard to root out one's idols. This almost legendary creature from the Rhineland, impressive as the legends of his own grape-purpled, castle-mounted slopes. Cosmopolitan! Man of the world!

Back to the inn now! A light was in her window. Up there she was packing. He must hurry.

Some one was coming behind him, quickly. It was a boy from the Kur-saal, with a note.

"From Schrieber! He said to say it was from Schrieber."

Franz took the white envelope. It was sealed. He considered opening it. The boy moved off.

"What is it, Franz?"

The window was not high. He could see her, in some foamy negligee, leaning out. Her voice was low, but it reached him clearly. He thrust the envelope, unopened, into his pocket, and forgot it.

"Could you help me with my luggage, *chérie*?" This from lips that had dramatically breathed "*Canaille!*" This tenderness after magnificent defiance! A lump came in his throat, born of those thousand inexpressible hopes. In a room, with a piano, high under a slanting Parisian roof, they would begin to come true.

V

WHEN he stopped at the wicket to buy the tickets, she made a motion toward her bag, but he waved it aside.

"I have money!" he said proudly enough, remembering now with gratitude a certain thriftiness that, through three years, had held him from undue extravagances.

The train came in, picked them up, swept them on. Past orchards whose trees were twisted gnomes, reeling in dizzy dance beyond the dusty panes, they sped; past canals, and water-brooks, gleaming with fleeting light. At times the engine sent a myriad

sparks into the night that fell in clinking smuts and cinders upon the cars.

The jerky song of the wheels rhythmically stimulated Franz's imagination. He had been in few trains; the adventure was not dulled by constant experience. The figures in the stuffy, crowded compartment carriages were hardly real, under the swaying oil lamps, that smoked in their limiting chains.

A stout woman with two children sat opposite. They had been eating oranges and chocolate; the latter left traces smeared on soft, kissable, cherub mouths, now opened a little in slumber, the former cut through the stale atmosphere with an unpleasant pungency. A countryman, bewhiskered, mouth frankly wide open, snoring, showing his yellow fangs of teeth, his boots too redolent of the stable, was next.

Beside Franz, a girl, in a cheap, tawdry way, attempted to make advances; who contented herself with grinning when she saw that, on the other side, by the window, a girl had fallen asleep on Franz's shoulder!

An immense tenderness filled Franz. It extended beyond the woman whose head he pillowed thus, scarcely daring to move his arm, thrilled with the contact. It took in the stout woman with her sleeping babes; the countryman snoring in his corner; it comprehended even the cheap, grinning girl next to him.

It reached out into the flying landscape, and hovered over village and town, unwitting of its presence. All these, if he could, Franz would make happy—as he was. If he were God, so might he reach out in spirit to bless a world. But the countryside fled by, unconscious of this immanence of blessing.

Something of all this he must compose into music, and give to the world. Something of this—

He slept.

Franz awakened to a pale crystal world, moving round to meet the sun.

The train had jerked to a stop. Mlle. Verenay was sleeping now with her head pillowed in the crook of her own arm.

Cautiously Franz moved out, too excited to remain quiet. He stepped out upon the platform. It was, he saw, a small junction point. Some peasants with market carts moved by, slowly jolting down the road. Instinct told him they were headed for Paris. The thought and the morning air were like wine.

"Twenty minutes to wait!" A train, to be crossed here, had been delayed. Perhaps his—his Parisienne—would join him, if she had wakened! Perhaps he had better waken her. How annoyed she would be to miss all this! He entered the car and touched her arm.

A sleepy mumbling: "What is it? This cursed train has stopped again. Oh, it's you! What's the matter? Do I look such a wreck?"

He protested gallantly.

"Are we in? Where is my bag? There, do I look a bit better? These trains play the devil with you! But, we're not in?"

"No. We stop here for twenty minutes!"

"But why did you waken me?"

"To—see the sunrise!"

"Oh!"

He felt instantly abased. He had treated her as a child. He had acted as a child himself. A man of the world would have traveled often enough to be sensible, and sleep when he could. She was regarding him now, not querulously as at first, but with an amused smile, through narrowed eyes. She caught his wrist as, hurt deeply, he turned to go. "No. Wait. Of course I wish to come!"

The crystal world had turned golden. But he restrained himself; he would not be caught again. Schrieber, who had seen everything, would be above that kind of thing. In Schrieber's own phrase: "A man of the

world must have poise, perspective, a sense of comparative values. The more a man sees, and feels, and hears, the more his critical faculty is sharpened!"

So Franz said nothing when the world turned from gold to purple and rose. There had been other and better sunrises; there would be other and better ones still. It would be lacking in critical judgment to be carried away by this. He said, matter of factly:

"We can't be far from Paris now, are we?"

"About half an hour."

"We must take a *fiacre* to a hotel," Franz said decisively. The blood sang in his ears to think of driving, they two, through Paris streets. "To a hotel," he repeated, in a businesslike voice. "Then we must at once see about lodgings—eh?" He catalogued the thing: "Two rooms, or even one; with a piano; high under the eaves, and a window overlooking Paris!"

His voice gave way; to speak of such things as business was sacrilege. He tried again:

"There are arrangements, of course! We must see about them at once. How does one go about getting pupils? Perhaps a notice in the papers—eh? And there will also be, I suppose"—he looked at her timidly, his face flushed—"some sort—of—ceremony?"

Man of the world! How Schrieber would have laughed, or would he? But Schrieber was not here. And Mlle. Verenay merely gave a shriek, crying out that the train was starting. So they hurried on. But it did not move for minutes, and the other passengers were by now awake, so business matters must stand aside.

Green open spaces, dotted with gray. More gray, presently, than green. Shriill toots of railway engines; gleaming metals; streets busy with early morning traffic: a dream city of green and gray, shot with pale morning gold. The noise and confusion of a terminal.

Panic mingled with Franz's ecstasy. How to go about things now!

"We will get a porter," said Mlle. Verenay, coming to the rescue. "Here, porter! Luggage. A *fiacre*!"

To Franz she said: "If you remain here by yours, he will come back. Meanwhile I shall see to getting mine in the *fiacre*!"

Franz nodded. He was glad to have her take charge. He felt much at a loss, and was willing to stand here all the day rather than stir into the immense mazes of confusion about him. The porter was gathering her things together.

Impressed with her air of assurance, and feeling her eyes upon him, Franz cried, reddening: "I am afraid I am not much good here!"

She caught his arm. "You will get used to it, my dear. You must learn to look after yourself!" She squeezed his hand. "Ah, Franz, I hope you will like Paris! I hope Paris will be good to you!"

He saw the porter staggering on with the bags; she waved to him gayly, and followed. He had felt a child, but now he felt a child no longer. Her voice had broken on those words, and brittleness had shattered into beauty. She needed him.

At the piano under the eaves, he would catch and imprison and somehow preserve that beauty that would break the world's heart when she sang. He waited, content, glowing, until the porter came, and took his stuff in turn. The din about him was transmuted also into music.

He imagined that high in a room above Paris one might write a symphony of sounds, harmonized, rising from the city's life. He followed the porter to the great doors and the street.

"A *fiacre*, *monsieur*?"

"The lady!" said Franz, trying to be authoritative.

"But the lady has gone, *monsieur*. The lady who sent me back for your things! She has taken a *fiacre* and

driven off! Moreover, she went, *monsieur*, without any payment!"

He rubbed his hands together. Franz saw only the grubby hands, suggestively moving upon each other. He put some money in them, not counting it. The man hurried away.

She could not have gone! There was a mistake about that! He began running along the line of waiting vehicles. Every driver touched his hat, expecting a fare in a hurry—which meant extra money; but all had the same answer:

"A lady? Tall and beautiful? In black?" They winked at one another; they coughed behind their hands. "But, *monsieur*, there are a thousand such every hour!"

The porter! What a fool Franz was to dismiss the fellow. He might know at least which way she went. But when Franz tried to find the man, there seemed to be a thousand of those blue-bloused, greasy-capped, grubby-handed fellows.

Franz went and sat disconsolately on his luggage, his hands despairingly in his pockets, as if opportunity for action had passed into inactive despair. It was then he felt the letter, the note of last night from Schrieber. He felt at least that here was a friendly and familiar touch. He opened it.

"By this time, my boy," wrote Schrieber, "you will have had a lesson of some sort. It is so we learn by experience. I am too old to think you will open this while the passion and the folly last. If you are caught in a web, look up my friend Hildreth, an English artist, whose address I inclose.

"If, as I hope, she merely uses you to pay her fare to Paris, thank whatever gods you have. You would not listen to Schrieber; but Schrieber will not taunt you with that. In time, with experience of life, you will learn wisdom. But me she could not deceive! Women of her type do not easily take in a man of the world!"

Men of Steel

These Hardy Souls of the North-land Have an Affinity to the Temper and Resilience of Strong Metal

By Sewell Peaslee Wright

"THERE MUST—
THERE MUST—BE
A WAY OUT!"



BERKHEAD'S grim, deeply lined face was a picture of mixed emotion as he plucked the folded paper from the cleft stick that stuck up so jauntily in the middle of the trail. The

dogs, squatting in their traces, with their breath hovering whitely around their heads, divided their time between licking at the powdery snow on either side and watching their master.

With his mittened hands, Corporal Berkhead unfolded the paper, his expression an odd mixture of interest, chagrin, admiration, and anger. The note began with the same flippant line that had headed the other notes, and was written in the same careless, masculine hand. It ran thus:

DEAR ARM OF THE LAW:

Perhaps I am mistaken—certainly I hope so—but I think you are gaining a little. I have warned you before about this, I think. You simply *must* be more careful!

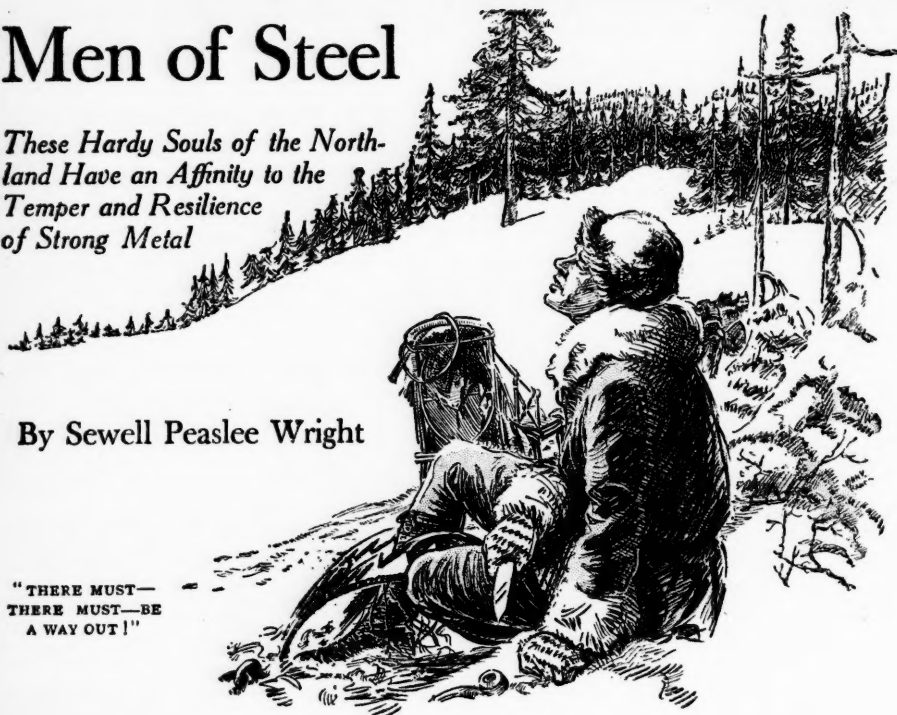
I was not joking, and I am not joking, in saying that you must not crowd me. If it appeals to you to stick to my trail after the best traditions of the force you so splendidly represent, very well; but don't try to go too far with the little sketch, and "get your man." I couldn't stand for that, really!

Please heed this well meant warning. It would distress me, my dear pursuer, to be forced to do something drastic. Pleasant dreams!

GAIL RUSSELL

An angry frown gathered on Berkhead's brow. Grimly he folded the note and placed it in a pocket with the others. The fellow must be crazy! Berkhead, a man hunter for many years, who had worn the scarlet tunic of the Mounted almost since he had been old enough to vote, had never known anything like this.

There was no gainsaying the fact that Gail Russell—that was only one of a number of names by which he was known and wanted—was a clever man.



He was also shrewd and merciless—as merciless as a starving wolf. Seven cold and brutal murders were laid to the door of the man whom Berkhead was trailing.

The dull gray day wore on. Berkhead ate a light lunch shortly after noon, and let the dogs have a rest. Then he pushed on. It was grim, tiring work, and yet never monotonous, for there was always the spice of danger.

Shortly before the early darkness fell, the man hunter topped a steep, lofty ridge, and at the very crest he found another note waiting. All around were the tracks of dogs, mingled with the larger footsteps of a man. Evidently Russell had paused and rested here.

Curiously Berkhead unfolded the note and read:

DEAR ARM OF THE LAW:

I'm afraid you are a stubborn sort of a chap. I'm sorry. I really think a lot of you, Berkhead. I used to get no end of kick out of hobnobbing with you up there on Black River.

You are getting closer all the time. I could actually see you, with my glasses, when I stopped here. Two of my dogs have bad feet; you've no doubt noticed the blood spots in the trail.

If you really insist on trailing along, you must go slower. I've warned you before not to crowd me. If you know my record, as a good policeman should, you'll understand that my warnings are not to be taken lightly.

I should dislike exceedingly to be obliged to—shall we say “eliminate”?—you. Use your head, man; don't force my hand!

GAIL RUSSELL

Berkhead muttered something under his breath as he savagely rammed the impudent missive into a pocket.

“I wonder,” he mused, “if he really thinks he can scare me!”

The policeman mulled the matter over until it was time to make camp, eventually coming to the conclusion that Russell was in deadly earnest.

“The chances are,” decided Berkhead, as he rolled up in his sleeping

robe, “that he has framed up, or will frame up, some plan for ‘eliminating’ me; and any plan of Gail Russell's is likely to be a pretty good one. I'm giving him credit for really meaning his warnings. He doesn't want to bump me off, but, if he has to, he'll do his damndest; and he's had some experience at it!”

Berkhead's last thought as he fell asleep was that if a couple of Russell's dogs had bad feet, two or three days ought to see the end of the trail.

II

EARLY the next forenoon Berkhead found another note. This time it was tacked to the door of a little shack, evidently some trapper's lay-over camp. The message was curt, and lacked the gay and friendly tone of those which had preceded it:

BERKHEAD:

Another dog has developed bad feet. I won't be able to make any time at all.

Once more I'm warning you to turn back. If you insist on being a damned fool, I shall have to protect myself. I have the means.

This is the last warning. Turn back now, or take the consequences.

GAIL RUSSELL

Nevertheless Berkhead did not hesitate. He strode up ahead of the dogs and started forward, noting with grim satisfaction the smudges of red in the trail he followed. Russell's dogs were evidently in bad shape, while the policeman's were hard and lean and strong with the wolf blood that was in them.

“He's not more than two or three hours ahead,” calculated Berkhead. “Perhaps by to-night, surely to-morrow I'll meet up with him; and then—”

Berkhead was not quite sure what would happen then. Either Russell was running a desperate bluff, or he had something up his sleeve. The man hunter believed that the latter theory was by far the more probable.

Berkhead's halt at noon was very brief. The trail was fresh, and be-

coming fresher every minute. It beckoned him on irresistibly. Striding on ahead of his dogs, his eyes searching the bush ahead for any sign of ambush, his ears strained to detect the least untoward sound, he marched on toward his fate.

The trail swung sharply to the left, into an almost impenetrable undergrowth. Automatically Berkhead noted places where Russell had tripped and struggled to keep from falling, for the bushes and branches beneath the high-piled snow made the going treacherous even for the most expert. The policeman was glad to keep in the trail the other man had made.

Perhaps a hundred yards from where the trail turned, Berkhead stepped over a fallen log, almost completely buried, that lay athwart the trail. He felt something give unexpectedly beneath his webs, and heard a muffled metallic click.

He tried to jump back, but no human muscles could be as quick as the steel springs that leaped up, black and vicious, on either side. Berkhead had a momentary glimpse of fanged, grinning jaws snapping from the snow; then there came the sharp crack of the snowshoe frame breaking and the snapping of the taut *babiche*. A sudden numbing agony tore through his leg, and from between the policeman's clenched teeth came one short sound of pain. The dogs stopped in a tangle of harness, watching with curious eyes.

"Good God!" whispered Berkhead, staring down at his imprisoned leg. "A bear trap!"

He did not make the slightest effort to free himself. He knew that two strong men, free, would be hard put to release him without the proper tools. A bear trap is a terrible thing. Only the intervention of the snowshoe frame had prevented the great toothed jaws from snapping the bones of Berkhead's leg as he himself might have broken a frost-brittle twig of jack pine.

Berkhead seated himself on the log.

Almost mechanically he drew out pipe and tobacco. His teeth came down hard on the worn rubber bit, and he pulled long and gratefully, drawing in the strong blue smoke almost savagely.

For a moment he had a wild idea of amputating his leg. He even drew his heavy knife from its sheath. Then he realized that such an operation would be immediately fatal, performed under such conditions by his unskilled hands. He even thought of attempting to saw through the tempered steel springs; but reason, still not quite dethroned, told him that his knife would be utterly useless for such a purpose. He let it drop nervelessly from his hand, and it sank silently into the snow, Berkhead watching it with staring, unseeing eyes.

"But there must be a way out!" he whispered to himself. "There always is, if you can only find it!"

He thought of several cases of which he had read or heard, of men dying horrible deaths after being caught in bear traps. He had never heard of any one escaping unaided. It was impossible, and yet—

"There's always a way out!" he repeated doggedly.

He ground the bit of his pipe between his teeth, while his cold, grim eyes were fixed on the heavy, unyielding springs of the trap. The burning agony in his foot and ankle lessened somewhat; below the jaws of the trap his leg, cut off from its blood supply, was slowly freezing.

"There must—there *must*—be a way out!" gritted Berkhead. "There *must*!"

III

THROUGH the rapidly falling dusk hurried a man—a man with a lean, keen face and eyes that seemed, in the gloom, fairly to burn in their cavernous sockets. Behind him limped a string of weary dogs, their tails low with fatigue.

The man was Gail Russell, but he

was not breaking trail through the trackless bush, as he had been doing for so many days. He was following a well defined trail—his own—following it backward.

His shoulders sagged wearily, and his chin rested on the frosted fur of his parka. He drove his legs stiffly, like pistons, his snowshoes dragging like weights. His face was haggard and gray, his lips were utterly colorless. Only his glowing eyes and the occasional twitching of his firm and almost aristocratic mouth betrayed the emotion that was seething in the man's brain.

Suddenly a voice broke the silence—a voice that crackled in the thin, cold air like the lash of a whip.

"Put them up, Russell! Quick!"

Russell started as if touched on a palpitating nerve, and slowly raised his mittened hands.

"Berkhead!" he whispered, peering through the gloom.

A weird, gaunt figure stepped from behind the shelter of a huge spruce. One leg was heavily swathed in strips of blanket, torn from the lining of a sleeping bag, on which, even in the dim light, dark, ugly stains were visible. It was Berkhead, his face drawn with pain and grim as a mask of death.

The policeman nodded curtly.

"Exactly!" he said, and strode forward, one hand holding a ready gun, the other reaching into his pocket.

The handcuffs glittered balefully in the cold gray light, and the steel clinked sharply, almost musically. Russell smiled with sardonic amusement as the circlets snapped tight around his wrists.

"In the toils of the law at last!" he said mockingly. "The arm of the law is long, eh?"

Berkhead looked up curiously.

"We'll make camp here, I think," he announced shortly. "It's getting dark, and we'll need plenty of wood."

Silently the two men went about the simple task of getting ready for the

night, Berkhead limping painfully, Russell wearily doing as much as he could with his manacled hands.

It was Berkhead who spoke first.

"You were back-tracking?" he inquired, setting aside his plate and cup.

Russell nodded, a sardonic smile again playing around his thin, taut lips.

"You got out of the trap?" he countered, with a glance at the policeman's bandaged leg.

"Obviously," replied Berkhead.

Again there was silence between the two—a silence broken only by the occasional weary whine of a dog and the sharp whisper of the wind in the trees. Again it was Berkhead who broke the silence.

"You look all in," he remarked.

Russell smiled an oddly crooked smile that seemed to dam the flow of a thousand bitter words.

"I am," he said. "That's why I turned back."

"Thought you'd be safe, I suppose," suggested the policeman.

There was no rancor in his voice. He was a player in a desperate game—a game played with rules made by desperate men fighting for life itself.

"Yes," nodded Russell. "I thought I would find you—in the trap. I was going—to let you out. The clamps are in my pack there. God knows why I took them—unless it was because they were there in the camp, with the trap."

A sudden wave of disgust swept over Berkhead. The man was yellow, after all, trying to curry favor now that he was a prisoner!

Russell read the thought as quickly and accurately as if it had appeared in print on the policeman's face.

"No," he said bitterly, "I'm not toadying. It was the end of the trail for me, and there was no need for us both to cash in."

"The end of the trail for you?" repeated Berkhead curiously.

For answer, Russell rolled up the bottom of his parka, his manacles

winking in the dancing light of the fire. He exposed to the policeman's startled gaze a heavy gray shirt soaked and stiffened with blood.

"I lost my rifle when I went through the ice that time, a week or so ago—remember? All I had left was my hand gun. Incidentally, I might have tried potting you from ambush if I hadn't lost the rifle. This afternoon, an hour or so after I left the trap, I saw a moose. I needed meat for the dogs. I tried to get him with the revolver, but in stalking him my webs caught on a snag just under the snow. I tripped, and the gun went off. It got me—here." He rolled down the skirt of the parka with hands from which the strength seemed nearly gone. "You can see the hole here, if you look close," he added.

"Good God!" began Berkhead, starting up. "Let me—"

Russell shook his head, his smile more grim and sardonic than ever.

"No use! It's the end of the trail for me. I said I'd never hang—and I won't, old arm of the law!"

The smile faded from his lips, and his face drew tense and hard with the agony that gripped him. A protest rose to Berkhead's lips and died there. It was no use denying the obvious.

"If there is anything I can do, tell me," the policeman said quietly.

"Thanks," said Russell, his voice edged with suffering. "There are two things—if you'll be good enough. I—I haven't long now."

Berkhead nodded mutely, his own throbbing pain forgotten in his sympathy for his prisoner.

"I'd like to have the irons removed," said Russell, holding out his manacled wrists. "I managed to avoid them while I lived, and it's a whim of mine to die without them."

The policeman fumbled for the key, unlocked the handcuffs, and dropped both key and irons in his pocket.

"And the second thing?" he asked quietly.

Without replying, Russell drew out a crumpled packet of cigarettes, selected one, and placed it between his lips—lips that were gray and quivering now. As he lit the thin white cylinder, his hands shook noticeably, despite the man's straining efforts to keep them steady.

"I'm wondering how you escaped from the trap," he said. "I've always heard it was impossible."

Berkhead stared down at his mangled leg for a moment before he spoke.

"Few things are really impossible when it's a case of have to," he said slowly. "A man's brain is a wonderfully active thing when it feels the sting of necessity. It was my knife that gave me the idea. I thought of trying to saw myself loose, but I knew my highly tempered knife would break like glass. Temper—it was the temper of the steel springs that I could not overcome. Man tempered those springs; man could remove it. So I built a fire with what wood I could reach, and drew the temper, keeping the jaws packed with snow to prevent burning my flesh. Then it was just a case of gritting my teeth and using what strength I had left."

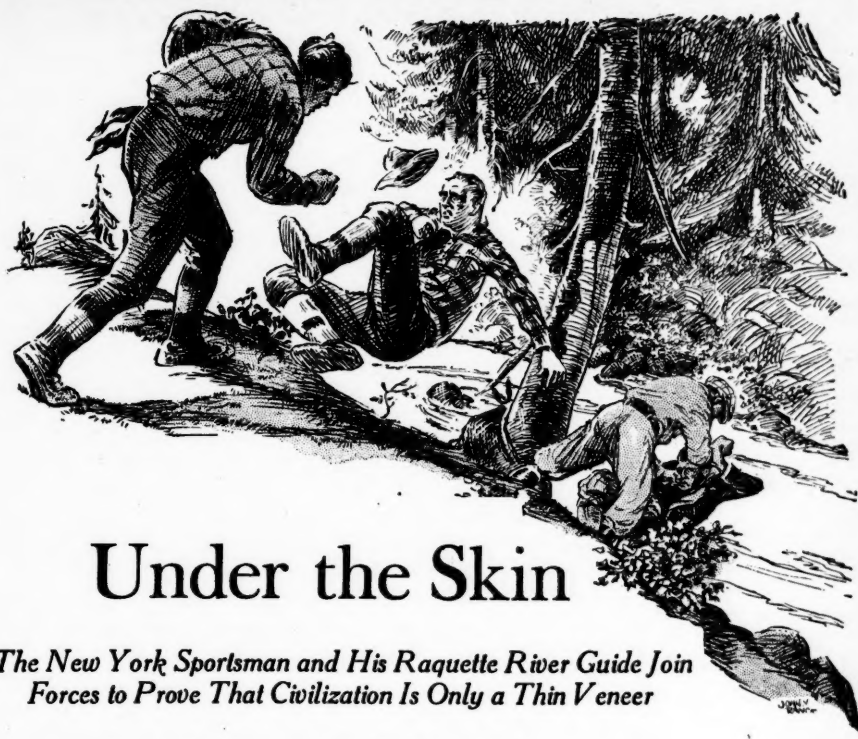
There was a momentary flicker of admiration in Russell's tortured eyes.

"You're right, Berkhead," he nodded. "A man's brain is a wonderful thing—even when it's twisted, like mine."

The cigarette dropped from nerveless lips. With what vitality there was in him, Russell screwed his thin gray lips into the ghastly semblance of a smile. Then his body sagged slowly forward, and he crumpled in the snow where he sat.

"Twisted!" whispered Berkhead.

Back in the shadows that danced around the fire one of Berkhead's huskies raised its pointed muzzle and howled, to tell the black and empty heavens that the hand of death had reached out from the void and had not returned empty.



Under the Skin

The New York Sportsman and His Raquette River Guide Join Forces to Prove That Civilization Is Only a Thin Veneer

By Theodore Goodridge Roberts



HE night was black and cold and windless. The frost crept in forest and swamp and barren, and laid a film of ice around lake and pond and along the shallow edges of streams.

The ice crept from edge to edge of the narrow dribble of dark water that was the beginning of Dipper Creek.

The tent beside the obscure beginning of Dipper Creek was warm and dry and cheerful. It was a tent of the simplest lean-to pattern—a slanted sheet of canvas fronting a fire. That fire was the explanation of the tent's warmth and cheer. It had been laid by an expert. Its back log was a ten-foot section of an old rampike, a yard through at the butt, hard and dry of rind, but soft and moist of heart. Against the back log's entire length,

between it and the open front of the lean-to, lay a bank of yellow brands and red coals.

The fire was two hours old. It had dried boots and blankets, boiled a kettle, fried potatoes, and broiled several pounds of moose steak. It had been replenished twice with lengths of green maple and birch and dry cedar.

Two men sprawled luxuriously in the tent. They had ground sheets, soft fir tips, and blankets between their relaxed joints and the hard ground. Tea, steak, and fried potatoes cuddled comfortably within them, and their pipes drew cool and sweet. They blinked contentedly at the long, glimmering, glowing fire. One of them was a sportsman from New York, and the other was his guide from Raquette River.

"This is comfort," said Mr. Hervey.

"'Tain't bad," admitted Tom Pender.

"Never tasted a better dinner. Never felt a softer bed."

"We had the right sauce for the moose meat, sir, and for the bed, too, I guess—hunger and fatigue."

"We slogged through thick and thin, that's a fact; but it was worth it. I don't regret a single mile or a single mud hole."

"You got a nice bull, mister. You sure pulled a couple of slick shots!"

"You showed me the way, Tom."

"It was a pleasure, sir—not to mention my duty."

Both were silent for fully ten minutes.

Hervey was the first to speak. He began with evident hesitation.

"The politeness of you people—I hope you won't object to my mentioning it, Tom—the good manners and good nature of all the guides and other backwoodsmen I've ever met in this province—used to surprise me, and still make me wonder. It would surprise me more now to meet with incivility or a show of bad temper in these woods than in a city, unless it was from an outsider; but I often wonder at it. It wasn't always so, if there's any truth in some of the tales one reads and hears. In the past, by all accounts, there were plenty of bad actors in the back settlements; but now—well, I honestly believe you to be the best-natured, politest, gentlest people in the world, and the most civilized, according to the highest meaning of civilization. What do you think about it?"

"That's right, too," returned the guide reflectively. "We act more peaceable now than we used to even when I was a boy. I mind seein' some real wicked fights 'twixt grown men, and maybe about nothin' worse than a dirty look or a sassy word. Yes, I guess things are better these days. There's less liquor sloppin' around this country now than in former times, for one thing. There's more business

sense, for another. To hear my grandfather tell it, a loggin' operation was more like war than commerce in his day—a darned foolish, bloody mess, what with their jamborees and fights and the tricks they called practical jokes. Operators wouldn't stand for no such goin's on nowadays, not even if the hands would risk their bones an' their wages. It don't pay—not at loggin', nor guidin' sports, nor just livin' alongside your neighbors. Bad business!"

"I agree with you," said Hervey; "but I think it goes deeper than that. I've listened to dozens of those old tales of violence—the French slash, and gouging, and chopping greenhorns down. It was bad for business, undoubtedly, but I'm inclined to think that the change is due to something at once deeper and higher than that. I believe that the natures of the people have changed."

"Maybe so; but take my old man, sir. He's had the name of bein' the best man on Raquette River—cock of the river, they used to call it—ever since he got his growth, and now he's in his fifty-fifth year. He made that name over thirty years ago. He felled more big spruces in a day than Red Sanders was able to—one more. That same night, back in camp, he danced Red clean off his feet to French Charlie's fiddlin'; and he bested him in a fight the very next day. Then come springtime and the drive, and he had to show how good he was on the runnin' logs. He birlled a champeen named Scanlon into the drink, followed him ashore, an' battled him to a finish.

"Another Scanlon took a crack at him; and he bested *him*. He cut out the key of the big log jam at Dead Man's Elbow. He won the title, so to speak, and he's hung on to it ever since; but now his methods are considerably different from what they used to be."

"What's he doing now, Tom?"

"It's nearly twenty years ago, sir, that he took to guidin' sports; and at that business he wasn't often called on to fight to show how good he was. He could show it in more peaceable ways—handlin' a canoe, trackin' moose and deer and bear, makin' camp. He was the smartest canoeman and slickest tracker inside sixty mile of Tumblin' Rapids, and he still is. He knows the country like a book, and it's a good country for rod an' gun. He's always been busy all summer with sports who wanted salmon and big trout, and all fall with sports wantin' record heads; so he could afford to give up loggin' and stream drivin'. That kept him out of the way of the slashers and rough-and-tumblers most of the time; but even so, in the first few years, he had to take a dare every now and then, and he took them all without worse than a busted nose. He was the best guide on the river, and the politest. Seein' the sports appreciated good manners, he cultivated them. It got so's he'd go a whole week on end with a smile on his face and never a cuss word out of him. More an' more sports took to comin' in every summer and fall, and more an' more smart woodsmen took to guidin'; and so bad manners—rough actions and tough talk—went out of fashion, but still my old man is the politest and the best. He gets invitations to go visit in New York and Boston and Montreal—yes, and in London, England; but it hasn't softened him any. He's still the same Bill Pender under the skin."

"Why do you think so?" asked Mr. Hervey.

"Well, sir, I'll tell you. He took two gentlemen in after moose along about this time last year. They were both strangers to him, but highly recommended, with letters of introduction from Dr. Wittimore. They wanted everything of the best, and expense no objection; so he took them up to his camp on the Windwhistle by water, himself and Mr. Dray in one canoe,

Nick Barry and Mr. Sproot in another, and a good cook and a handy man and all sorts of grub in a third. Both sports were big men, weighin' over two hundred pound apiece, and bulgin' with money and cigars and flasks. They hadn't been over three hours on their way when my old man was startled by a shot from Nick's canoe; so he dropped back alongside.

"Did you miss it, sir?" he asks Sproot, polite as pie.

"Sproot admits as much.

"What was it?" asks the old man.

"The sportsman says he doesn't know.

"I got no idea what he was shootin' at, Bill," says Nick, "for I didn't see it."

"Well, sir, my old man made them all go back and hunt around, but they didn't find any blood or anything. Then he told both gentlemen, in the politest language, never to pull on anything, or even aim at anything, if they don't know its nature. He pointed out the dangers of such carelessness—how you might kill a human being, or a domestic animal, or even a cow moose—but all as polite as a schoolma'am talkin' to a trustee, accordin' to Nick Barry. After that, just to make sure they knew what to shoot at and what not to, he read them the game laws."

The guide paused to make a long arm, grab a stick of birch, and throw it onto the fire.

"He did right," said Hervey, "How did Sproot take it?"

"Not so good. He laughed; but Mr. Dray was real nice about it, and shut up Mr. Sproot with an ugly look. They made camp next day, well along in the afternoon, without any more shootin'. That's a good camp, and Steve Lumm's a good cook. They ate dainty and slept soft. My old man found Mr. Dray a big bull with a nice pair of horns next mornin', and Mr. Dray got him with the second shot. They were afoot, and quite a ways from camp, so all they toted home was

the head and some steaks and roasts, intending to come back with Lumm and the handy man for the hide and the rest of it. Mr. Dray was well satisfied. That was the first bull moose he had ever seen at the end of a rifle, and he was mighty proud of that second shot. He had a right to be, too, for the first went clear over the tree tops.

"Well, sir, when they got back to camp, they found all hands sittin' around and Lumm fryin' moose meat.

"So you got one, too," says Mr. Dray to the other sport. "Where's the head? Here's mine. Bet you five white chips mine's got the widest spread of horns."

"That's the name those two sports had for hundred-dollar bills—white chips.

"Show him that head, Barry," says Sproot to Nick.

"Nick got red in the face and didn't say a word.

"Don't tell me you've mislaid it," says the sport, with a grin. "You had it last. Feel in your pockets."

"Nick's face got redder, but he didn't say a word. He looked darned embarrassed.

"What's the joke?" asks Mr. Dray.

"Sproot says it's on him, whatever it is, and he's willin' to pay for it. He stuck a hand in a pocket and turned to my old man.

"What's the price, Pender?" he asks.

"The price of what, sir?" the old man asks back, polite but cold.

"A pair of horns for that moose I shot," says the sport, and he pulled out a roll of money.

"It was a cow, Bill," Nick blurts out. "I told him so. I tried to stop him shootin'."

"How much?" asks the sport, peelin' off the fifties.

"Money won't grow horns on a cow moose, Mr. Sproot," says the old man, his voice tremblin' with politeness.

"Sproot laughed and held up five or six fifties, all opened up, right in the old man's face. Then the old man forgot his manners. That big sport landed on the back of his neck in a corner. At the second fling, he went outside, openin' the door for himself with the top of his head. I guess the change we talked of is more a matter of conditions than of human nature, sir."

"Sproot was trying to bribe your father to keep the killing of the cow moose from the authorities," said Mr. Hervey reflectively. "I don't blame your father for feeling indignant and expressing his indignation. He had warned the man against unlawful shooting. Sproot got no more than his due, in my opinion."

The guide smiled as he reached forward and tossed more fuel against the glowing back log. After a brief silence, Hervey spoke again.

"The story of your father's outbreak supports my argument rather than yours," he said. "The breaking of the game laws, and the offer of a bribe, were what roused his ire—just as they would have angered any self-respecting, civilized man."

"Not exactly, sir, by my old man's own tellin'," returned Pender. "If Mr. Dray had been the offender, he would have refused the money, sent him out to rail head and reported him to the chief game warden—nothin' more; but he didn't like Sproot. From the very first time that sport spoke to him, he was lookin' for an excuse to try his stuff on him. It's the same with me, sir. When I don't like a man, all I want's the excuse to tear into him. The original old bushwhacker is still alive in most men in these woods, and not a great ways under the skin, at that!"

"But not only in these woods," said the sportsman. "The original old bushwhacker, or the old Adam—they're one and the same, I take it—survives in all parts of the world and in all grades of society. I still contend

that the guides and woodsmen of this province are the best-natured, soundest-tempered people I know."

"Well, sir, I'm proud to hear you say so; but I guess it's only your own good nature talkin'. Any man who couldn't get along peaceably with you would have to be a fool."

II

MR. HERVEY and his guide packed out to their canoe next morning. They had four miles to go; and so heavy were the antlered head, the hide, and the choice cuts of Hervey's bull that they had to make two trips. The way was rough and tangled. When the task was completed, it was so close to noon that they boiled the kettle and dispatched their midday meal before launching and freighting the big canoe.

The course of Dipper Creek is steep, crooked, narrow, and studded with bowlders. This is especially so from the point at which Hervey and Pender embarked down to the lightning-blasted hemlock six miles below. Those six miles are navigable only at high water, and then only by experts.

Mr. Hervey sat just forward of the middle bar, with the green moose hide for a cushion and folded blankets at his back, very comfortable. Tom Pender stood aft, swinging and placing a long pole of spruce, and leaning forward against it. Thus he "snubbed" the loaded canoe down the sloshing, slobbering course.

Now he held her quivering, while the dark water swelled to the gunwales and the bow swung slowly to the right. He released her, and she plunged between two great bowlders which appeared to surge up to meet her, to sink and rise and sink again. He snubbed her, released her, checked and held her again.

Thus, for a mile or more, she threaded the perilous passes; and then, when she was poised quivering for another leap, the restraining pole snapped sharp off about midway of its quiver-

ing length.

Just about everything that could possibly happen to a canoe and two men happened then in less time than it takes to tell it. Pender followed his lost point of balance forward at a slant and shot overboard. His feet, the last part of him to move, were heaved clear of the gunwale by a twisty jounce of the canoe's stern. The canoe jumped; and Hervey, staring dazedly to his front from his cushion of moose hide, beheld a rounded bulk of wet black moss lurch up from the sliding water and wallow forward to meet her.

They met; and then Hervey realized that he was in Dipper Creek—upside down in it, he judged. He saw black and amber and green. His fingers clawed wet moss. His feet struck and slid. He glimpsed daylight and white froth. Then something vast and black, alive and clinging and heavy beyond belief, enveloped him.

He fought the monster desperately, rolling and kicking and clawing to get clear of it. It seemed to him a struggle of hours before his head was freed from the enveloping weight. At the same moment both his elbows and both his knees struck rock and held; and he found himself in shallow water, within a yard of dry land.

In front of him stood Tom Pender, dragging the big moose hide ashore. Tom's face was red from exertion.

"Hurt, sir?" asked the guide.

Hervey scrambled to his feet, shaking water from his ears and blowing it from his nose.

"Guess not," he gasped. "What the devil? Was I fighting that moose hide?"

"It had you down, sir. 'I'd 'a' come sooner, but I was wrastlin' with the canoe and the duffel, and I didn't see the fix you were in. The rifles got caught in the tent, and didn't fall out, and there's the head, sir, aground against that rock. See the horn stickin' up?"

An amused voice spoke with empha-

sis from the top of the bank.

"That was the *funniest* show I've seen in ten years!" it said.

Pender turned and Hervey looked up. They saw two men standing on the edge of the bushy bank. One was obviously a sportsman. Both were smiling.

"You been standin' there lookin' on?" cried Pender. "Why the hell didn't you lend a hand?"

"Why should we?" returned the gentleman in the leather coat. "It wasn't serious, and it was too good a show to horn in on. You missed something—the battle of the moose hide!"

Mr. Hervey passed Tom Pender, walking fast.

"We missed something, did we?" said Hervey, as if talking to himself. "It was a good show, was it?"

He walked right up the bushy bank, pulling off his dripping coat of canvas and lamb's wool as he went, with the air of one anxious to find a fire and dry his garments. His eyes were bright, and their expression was intent. His cheeks were pale behind their tan.

He reached the top of the bank, where the two smilers still stood and smiled.

"Funny, was it?" he asked.

As he spoke, he swung his dripping coat and slashed it across the face of the man in the dry leather garment. Then he loosed his hold of the wet coat and slapped with an open, wet hand.

Hervey and the other sportsman rolled down the bushy bank together. Tom Pender, on his way up, had to jump quick to avoid being knocked down and rolled flat.

"Hoorroo!" yelled Tom, continuing his ascent of the bushy slope at increased speed.

"Drag that fool off!" screamed the guide on the brow of the bank. "That sport of mine's a Senator!"

Pender's reply to that, delivered immediately upon gaining the other's

level, was a wallop on the ear. It was returned. The two guides clinched.

III

HALF an hour later Hervey and Pender resumed their descent of Dipper Creek with a borrowed canoe pole, leaving the man in the leather coat and his guide reclining listlessly at the edge of the stream. Hervey had a swollen eye and several skinned knuckles, but he had given far more than he had received. Pender had a cut lip.

Neither of them spoke until the easier water below the lightning-splintered hemlock was reached. There the guide ran the pole inboard, sat down, and manned a paddle.

"That proves it!" he said, with a note of satisfaction in his voice.

"Yes," admitted the sportsman, but without enthusiasm. "The old Adam had his innings that time!"

"Just like I said, sir. All I've been waitin' for was the excuse to show that dish of tripe where he got off!"

Hervey turned his head at that, and regarded his guide with his one serviceable eye.

"Did you know that fellow?"

"I'll say so," replied Pender. "I've known him twenty years, sir; and it's goin' on three years now I've been waitin' for an excuse to tear into him—ever since he told a girl some lies about me!"

The sportsman sighed.

"It proves my argument, Tom," he said, after a minute's silence. "You are less of a savage than I am."

"How's that, sir? Darned if I can see a mite of difference between us in that particular case—except that you moved quicker than I did."

"But you had something against *your* man, Tom."

"I sure had, sir. I was wonderin' what you had against the Senator."

"Senator? He might have been a bishop, for all I knew. I never set eyes on him before—the big stiff!"

"You win, sir," said Tom Pender.

Bob Davis Recalls



How O. Henry, Master of Laughter and Tears in the Printed Word, Put the Soul into a Brother Writer's Short Story

RESCUES THE FAIR LADY AND GALLOPS AWAY WITH HER

By Robert H. Davis

QUENE afternoon about twenty years ago the atmosphere of my office in the Flatiron Building was being revitalized by a visit from the immortal O. Henry, when an ambitious young author sent in his card.

Conscious of the beneficial effects that a glimpse of the acknowledged leader of them all would have upon any student of plot and style, I invited him in.

It was a memorable meeting, for me, at least. The pupil was confused, while the master, with that benignant gentleness that made him paradoxically a marked man, undertook to and

did set the youth at his ease. The entente was complete after a few sentences, and the conversation turned to the fiction market, with particular emphasis upon the importance of plot. And at that particular period plot and suspense were the Gold Dust Twins in popular literature.

"I have a story that I call 'Chivalry,'" said the beginner, casting anxious eyes in the direction of O. Henry, "but for some reason or other it seems to lack the right kind of a finish."

O. Henry, skilled in the tricks of professional parley, sagged a little in his chair and relaxed as one who sees no avenue of escape.

"Do you mind ——?"

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"Let's have it," spoke the biographer of Manhattan's Four Million.

The amateur aviator spun his propeller, rose into the air, and began to hum:

"Kind of a romance, located in the South; where you came from, sir. Old Virginian, saturated with chivalry, lives alone in the country with but few neighbors. Near his estate is a deserted house that has been rented by a quiet couple, apparently from the North. They are not the least bit hospitable, and wholly disregard the social call paid upon them by the Old Virginian. Frequently he passes their home on horseback, but is never invited in. Naturally he resents this, and finally comes to the conclusion that the newcomers are utterly lacking in good manners. One day, while riding past their gate, he discerns a white handkerchief fluttering from an upper window. This he regards as a signal of distress, which it proves to be. He rides in with all the courage of a Don Quixote and offers his services. The woman, apparently alone, hurriedly explains that she is a prisoner, and begs him to rescue her from the harsh jailer who has barred her way to liberty. Fine for the Old Virginian, who pants for adventure. The next night, while the brutal jailer is visiting a near-by town the Old Virginian, mounted on Andrew Jackson, his favorite horse, and leading a gentle mare, comes to the house, rescues the fair lady and gallops away with her to the railroad eight miles distant, flags the train, and with a knight errant's farewell and a tender paternal embrace, bids her God-speed. Great! He has rescued a lady and probably encompassed the downfall of a scoundrel. The train pulls out with the rescued lady on board waving her kerchief in farewell.

"Filled with satisfaction, he rides leisurely home, beds down his horses, and repairs to the old drawing-room, there to sit in meditation and review the night's work. While in this con-

templative mood it dawns upon first his eyes and then his intelligence that something has gone wrong. For one thing various objects of art left to his forbears by Lafayette, Washington, Patrick Henry and others have disappeared from the center table. Certain priceless paintings have been cut from their frames. A vandal hand has been laid on his numerous possessions. He reaches for his twenty-four carat full-jeweled Swiss watch, which came down from his great-grandfather and bore a miniature of his wife, who died in her girlhood. That, too, had vanished from his sagging vest pocket, filched by the shapely fingers of the charmer as she bade him farewell at the train. Treachery: A pair of Northern confidence operators have stripped him of his Lares and Penates. He invokes the curses of darkness upon all peoples residing north of Mason and Dixon's line. Morning finds him prostrated and ill in a voluminous arm-chair by an open window. His exhaustion is complete and his pride wounded beyond words. Chivalry be damned—

"That's as far as I've got," said the narrator reflectively. "Seems to be hanging in the air. I don't know what to do with the old boy. If I leave him there he'll starve to death. Suggest something."

O. Henry gazed out into the open across his own Bagdad, apparently in deep reflection. After a spell of silence that seemed interminable, he spoke.

"May I—?"

"I'll be grateful if you will."

The author of that other "Unfinished Story" which is to-day incorporated in every living tongue and known throughout the world, summoned the Genie of his Genius.

"Let him mourn for a day or two," said he. "Southerners have a way of recovering from what seems at the time to be a death blow. You can then conclude the story

about as follows—"

O. Henry talked slowly for a few moments, defined clearly his idea for a finish, and said good-by.

The young author returned the next day with the O. Henry addition, which, verbatim from the finished story, is printed herewith:

Three days later Colonel Pembroke Pendleton sat silent and apathetic in his despoiled library and looked up gloomily as his servant entered.

"Mars' Pem," said the old man softly, "dis here letter jes' come for you; de man say dere's ere package down to de 'spress office, too."

The colonel seized the letter eagerly and

tore it open. A sudden glow of happiness lighted his face. It ran:

DEAR SIR:

I am sending your watch back to you by express; after seeing the beautiful miniature within I had not the heart to keep it. Over the other things that were taken from you I have no control. If all men were like you there would be no bad women.

There was no signature; none was necessary.

"By gad, suh," cried the colonel, starting up with a radiant face, "Ah deserve to be thrashed, suh, for doubting a lady fo' one minute. Ah should have known she was actin' under duress. The loss of my silver plate and my precious trinkets is a paltry matter. The chivalry of the South is vindicated, suh—it is vindicated, by gad, suh!"

BEFORE THE GONG

'Tis the voice of the slugger,
I hear him complain:
"You have shelved me too soon!
Let me hit 'em again!
Bring on your tough youngsters,
Just achin' to go;
And I'll knock 'em all flat
With a fancy K. O.

"Though I'm not in my heyday,
I've still got a punch!
Trot out your hard babies,
I'll lick the whole bunch!
Let 'em put on the gloves an'
Step into the ring;
I'll show 'em who's master!
Age don't mean a thing!

"All I need is good trainin'
A partner who'll hit,
Then, by crickey, I'll spoil 'em
With a tap o' the mitt!
Bring on your new champeens,
Your lads with ambish;
I'll hand 'em the gravy
On a five-knuckled dish!"

'Tis the voice of the slugger,
I hear him complain:
"You have shelved me too soon!
Let me at 'em again!
Just put up the money,
An' bring on your man;
An' they'll take him away
With the dust in the pan!"

Clarence Mansfield Lindsay

THE WORLD TO-DAY



Photo by Galloway.

NOT A MOVIE SET—IT IS ARGENTAT, A MEDIEVAL VILLAGE IN SOUTHWEST FRANCE

France Outside of Paris

The Start of a Trip by Motor Through the Parts Which Are Not So Well Known to the Sight-seer

By Dorothy Dayton



SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE.

IF, after a few weeks in Paris, you decide you'd like to see the un-Americanized portions of France, you begin an investigation of the various methods of travel.

There's the bus trip. All the travel agencies specialize in them—the battlefield trip, the château trip, the Normandy and Brittany trip—many

others. These cost about thirty-five dollars for a three-day jaunt, bus of about twenty equipped with a guide, and meals and hotel—but not wines and baths.

But if you have taken the château trip, lovely as it is, inspected a dozen châteaux in three days, panted up and down hundreds of moldy stairs, heard endless lectures on French history, renaissance architecture, peered into

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countless damp cellars, always with the guide's admonition to "hurry, now, we have yet four more châteaux to do to-day," ringing in your ears, you probably reach the conclusion that the art of touring isn't yours.

After all, another cellar is just another cellar, regardless of who languished there. And after the sixth château another château is just another château.

HOW TO GET AROUND

Railroad travel isn't so good, particularly if you suddenly set out upon an overnight trip and the ticket agent simply refuses to understand your twelve words of excellent French.

You discover that there are no "wagon beds" on this train, and you have to share a compartment with two Frenchmen and a German. You figure that on your three feet of upholstered bench you can have a delightful night reading your new French history. But of one accord the two Frenchmen and the German, without consulting your wishes in the matter at all, draw the curtain and dim the light and set about the business of making themselves comfortable for the night.

There is nothing to do but to curl up in your three feet of space and make the best of it, hoping that you'll be lucky enough to wake up in the morning in time to get off at Bordeaux. Nothing that corresponds to an American porter or train attendant ever appears, and you only know that you have reached your station by keeping a sharp lookout for the sign.

Really, we must have a car, yet with gasoline at forty-three cents a gallon the inducements for motoring aren't all they might be.

INVESTING IN A CAR

The usual rent for a car in France is fifteen dollars a day. Or if you are lucky enough to own one in America you can bring it to France for one hundred dollars each way and considerable

red tape. So you begin to haunt French automobile salesrooms. Here, for the price of a Ford, you may have a snappy little crimson model, leather inside and out, four cylinder, with all the long, graceful lines of the large car, and so light that if it won't run you can push it in an emergency.

With an enterprising girl friend you arrange for a buyer in advance, on condition that everything is shipshape, and with one hundred dollars apiece, a few road maps, and eleven days ahead of you, you start off to see France and all the places you have always read about, yet picture only vaguely.

You begin at Arcachon, that pleasant little French summer resort, with red-roofed houses and bushy tamarack trees on a blue bay—where all the men wear red flannel trousers and berets, and where you can get a comfortable hotel room for forty-eight cents a day. White roads with trees that form perfect Roman arches overhead, pine forests carpeted with purple flowers—endless vineyards—that is the lovely first impression of rural France.

THE NARROW HIGHWAY

There's never a dull moment in the three-day trip from Arcachon to Biarritz and over the Pyrenees. Here you have everything from Spanish haciendas to heavily walled French villages—the same houses and walls and almost the same customs as in feudal days.

Châteaux, too, strongly fortified, and much more interesting than those in the guidebooks and on the regular château trip. Lacy Gothic churches and old fortified castles perch perilously on top of the hills. Roads wind tortuously around the mountains, wonderful smooth roads, centuries old but still the marvel of modern engineers. Narrow they are, though, and the car hovers dizzily on the edge while below stretch the fertile valleys, every foot cultivated, on and up, almost to the very peaks of the mountains.

Farms even here, where white clouds hover a few feet above the chimney tops, and the fields slant at such an angle that the haystacks seem about to slide off. Hills tingle with the sound of cow and sheep bells. And here is Pau of hill and dale which Lamartine said was the noblest view of earth as Naples was the noblest view of the sea.

We reach Biarritz with its American jazz and fashionably dressed women, English, Spanish, French, American, Italian. And a few miles out of Biarritz wooden shoes, and donkeys, priests in long robes, flapping along on bicycles, and oxen with dust mops over their eyes. Thatched roofed houses sag with the weight of age.

PEOPLE ALONG ROUTE

The people speak a different dialect, and each village is different. Here and there a fashionable French watering place rubs elbows with a walled village of cobbled streets, where the women still do their washing in the near-by streams, or in the stone wash house. The town crier instead of the newspaper, with his broad hat and jaunty cape, beating on a drum. Crying out news of who will be the President of the United States. But no news of any other foreign country.

Regardless of the French attitude toward Americans in Paris, these simple people still like us. Woodrow Wilson remains a hero, and most of the villages have an Avenue du Président Wilson.

Two girls driving along is still a novel sight to them. The whole village clusters about the little red splendor, and wants to know where you have been and whither you are going, and why, and if you aren't afraid. They are friendly and delightful, and food is good and cheap.

You find that driving in France is very simple. No traffic rules, and never a traffic cop anywhere. No speed limits. The only rule seems to be to keep tooting. But you have to learn to dodge

bicycles, sheep, geese, cows, and pedestrians in the village streets. They never get out of one's path, and on the country roads the bicycle and pedestrian seem to have the right of way. Most of the traffic is bicycle and wagon, and here and there a tourist car. You learn, too, that the bicycle race is sacred in France. Near St. Gaudens the main highroad is blocked for two hours while a bicycle race is on.

You have never seen valleys so fertile, never a foot of ground wasted, with gardens that extend to within a foot of the railroad track. Houses and walls covered with grape vines. Many women and a few men working with scythes and hand harrows in the fields. In the smaller villages the women are in faded black and long skirts, old and weatherbeaten. In the larger and more fashionable towns families drive in hacks with silk canopied and fringed tops and always at the village walls are the bands of Spanish gypsies.

It is easy to follow the road maps, and you discover to your delight that even though gasoline costs 12.50 to 13.50 francs here in the hills, or something like forty-four cents a gallon, your little French car averages thirty-five miles a gallon, even on the hills.

Although you have been warned against traveling without a schedule, and without hotel reservations, there is no difficulty in finding neat, comfortable hotels. At Biarritz, expensive as it is, the hotel room was two dollars and forty cents. In these larger towns in the Pyrenees it is less, twenty-five and thirty francs. One franc—four cents—for having the wheels greased, is another item on my expense record.

But try to find a bath. The hotel at St. Gaudens had one, but the whole bathroom had been rented to an Englishman, and a bed installed. Here at Bourg-Madame, the bathtub is full of bulrushes, and Madame refuses to have them removed. There is so little demand for it that it is now used for storage purposes.

The Westernization of Turkey



Photo by De Cou. From Ewing Galloway, N.Y.

THE FAMOUS GALATA BRIDGE, LOOKING TOWARD STAMBOUL

President Kemal of Turkey Abolishes Polygamy, Reforms Religion, Dismantles Palaces and Destroys All Books of Magic

By John Gunther



UP in Constantinople there is a statue. It is interesting because until the Kemalist movement no statues in Turkey, a good Moslem country, were permitted. The statue is interesting, too, because it is of a man in a dinner jacket, but the trousers are cuffed. The Turks are far too busy with the essentials of westernization to worry about the ornamentalia.

The statue stands significantly just at the foot of the Seraglio, ancient palace of the Sultans. Only a few feet behind is the black swimming pool where hefty maidens swam while the sick man of Europe watched from a lacquered pavilion. Before the statue is the most magnificent view in Europe, the sea of Marmora dividing into Bosphorus and Golden Horn. The statue is in Europe, but Asia is just a few minutes' row away; and one might write significance, too, in the fact that

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the statue commands the straits.

Here, then, Mustapha Kemal Pasha stands in bronze. Like a Colossus he bridges the straits. There are many other statues of Kemal in Turkey, and pictures of him are everywhere. A new statue is going up soon in Taxim, the fashionable quarter of Constantinople—to be paid for, by the way, by a tax of five piasters on every pound of meat slaughtered in the Stamboul abattoir. Meanwhile, in all the statues the costume is strictly of the west.

THE HAREMS GONE

The westernization of Turkey is said generally by observers to be the most interesting pictorial and dramatic fact in Kemal's revolution. I am not sure that this is true, and some observers insist that no real fundamental westernization has taken place. But on the surface there are dozens of changes of extreme interest.

First, of course, is the change of government. For many centuries Turkey was the most complete of eastern absolute monarchies, and now it is a republic, the chief of which wears, symbolically, a bronze dinner jacket. Sultan is gone and caliph is gone, and with him much of Turkish tradition.

For instance, there are the palaces. Yildiz Kiosk—from the back door of which the last Sultan, Mehmed VI, fled to a British warship—was turned into a gambling casino, but the Italian, Maria Serro, who ran the concession, has failed, and its present status is obscure.

REFORMS RELIGION

Two other palaces, Dolma Bogtche and Beylerbey, are almost dismantled, but Kemal lived in Dolma Bogtche during his Constantinople visit last summer. The Seraglio—miracle of miracles!—has been thrown open to the public as a museum. Cook's tourists peer now where once harem dancers jibed the eunuchs.

The treasury still exists. The sul-

tan's jewels are worth millions upon millions of dollars. Probably Kemal will sell them at a not too future day.

Again there is the general matter of laicization. Conservatism and reactionism lingered longest in the church and therefore the church and clergy have suffered severely. Kemal's Turkey is a lay state.

The ministry of pious foundations, the celebrated *efkaf*, has been abolished and with it the immense tribute which it controlled. Monasteries have been abolished as the hotbeds of reaction; seminaries are rigorously controlled. The Sheik-ul-Islam, the supreme interpreter of Koranic law, has gone by the board and the department of religious affairs, once the second most important of the sultan's ministries, is replaced by an obscure government bureau—with three clerks. All church property has been seized; all political power has been shorn from the clergy; priests now can wear their white headpiece and other traditional costumes only at prayer.

This is not an attack on Islam. In the very second article of the Turkish constitution, Islam is proclaimed the religion of state. What Kemal is doing—so his supporters say—is to restore Islam to its old austere purity, to pare it down to that lean and strenuous activity which distinguished it in the days of the Prophet. Most of the reforms are directed not against the Koran, but against so-called traditions.

A WHOLE LOT OF LAW

There is again the important matter of dress. Doubtless readers are tired of hearing that the picturesque crimson fez has gone, but the fez is important, because it was a symbol of prayer. With a brimmed hat, the Moslem cannot pray. Well, Kemal abolished the fez. The Moslem continues to pray, but even in Ramadan the mosques now are empty. Religious matters did not enter into the abolition of the veil.

Then there is the matter of law.

Last year Turkey formally adopted the Swiss civil code, also the Italian criminal code and certain provisions of German commercial law. This huge mass of doctrine suddenly put on a nation, like a load on a horse, has not yet, naturally, been assimilated; and even if the law is theoretically Western, Eastern deviousness, corruption and evasion are as common as before.

Women are having a good time in Kemal's Turkey. I had tea with Turkey's first woman lawyer; and there are women doctors, civil servants and teachers. There are no woman deputies, and Kemal and Ismet seem resolutely opposed to woman suffrage at this present writing.

ONE WIFE A PIECE

The first marriage between a Moslem woman and a Christian occurred March 2 last year. The marriage service is entirely civil. And a further astonishing step has been taken with a law providing for a compulsory physical examination of both man and woman, of whatever religion, on application for a marriage license. The penalty for violation of this order is imprisonment for fifteen years!

Polygamy was abolished last year,

although those optimistic Turks who previously had married their full quota of four wives are permitted to keep them. Birth control is forbidden. Divorce is now extremely difficult in Turkey under the Swiss code and Kemal himself could not get a divorce, as he did by simple decree a few years ago, under the new law his government is promulgating.

These are a few of the main channels through which from the Angora citadel the Ghazi is pouring this western flood. There are many smaller channels ramifying from the central ones. All books about magic, for instance, are ordered to be destroyed. A census was taken, the first in Turkey's history, on October 28, by the novel and dramatic method of keeping the whole population—except the census takers—within doors all day. A campaign is going on against gambling, drunkenness and prostitution.

As I was leaving Constantinople I heard news of a last and final supreme reform. Turkey will never be the same again. Compulsory disinfection is contemplated of every single building in the city. Smell now! The last chance is slipping! Old Turkey has all but gone!

THE COMPLAINT OF THE DERELICT

THOUGH I fought through the night, they left me with break of day:
They were sure I was going to sink, so they pulled away;
I kept them safe, washed over by many a sea—
They might have fought a little longer, for me!

Now, blind, down the starless night, riding full a-beam,
Head-on bears a sister ship, all her ports a-gleam,
Driving upon me sheer through the dark and the sleet
I can hear the boson's whistle, the sailors' feet—
Soon the crash and the cry will come, and the broken wail
Of the wireless calling for help along the gale.

And still, while great waves come up over my side,
I shall flounder—drifting, drifting still with the tide,
Plunging and plunging my blackened, weed-grown breast
To the North, to the East, to the South, to the reddened West,
A menace to all the sound ships of the sea
Because my captain too early abandoned me!

Harry Kemp



"LUCKY? I'M GOING TO BE HUNG!"

The Queen of the Jury

A Complete Novelette—Drama Behind the Scenes in a Celebrated Murder Case—The Young Reporter Who Dared to Oppose His Newspaper, Politics, and a Beautiful Woman

By Louis Weadock

CHAPTER I

THE MAN IN MAHOMET'S COFFIN



THE end of the long two-inch rope was attached to a chimney on the roof of the Criminal Court Building. The other end was attached to young Fred Kingsley, an *Evening News* reporter, who was about to be lowered down an air shaft upon which opened a window in the jury room.

This room, where eleven good men and true, and one good woman and true, were to decide whether another

rope was to be attached to the neck of Fergus Barton, now on trial for the murder of his sweetheart, and at this moment listening to the judge's charge to the jury, was two floors below the parapet upon which sat young Fred Kingsley.

"I'm going to feel like Mahomet's coffin," he said, pinching out the cigarette with which he had been soothing his nerves.

Only one of the half dozen other members of the eavesdropping expedition answered him.

"Mahomet?" repeated the red-faced deputy sheriff through whom the ar-

rangements had been made. "I don't know the guy."

Kingsley's eyes came back from the bottom of the shaft, six floors below. "He died some time ago," he explained patiently. "They hung his coffin in the air."

"Allee samee they're goin' to hang this bozo, Barton," volunteered one of the *Evening News* men. "They ought to. He's guilty as hell."

"I don't believe it," Fred Kingsley said.

A man's head and shoulders appeared at a trapdoor in the roof. "Hey," this messenger called excitedly, "the jury's just went out!"

"Time to shove off," Fred Kingsley said, outwardly calm, as he motioned to the others to lay hands on the rope.

When they had done so, and he had made a final examination of the pulley, hooked to the parapet, through which the rope ran, he let himself over the ledge.

"Easy, now," he cautioned, his legs dangling from the canvas cradle in which he sat, his hands still on the parapet. "It's a long drop. And don't take your eyes off the signal cord. As soon's you see it move, pull me up. What's the correct time?"

One of the men who, in tug-of-war fashion, was holding the rope, glanced at his wrist watch and answered: "It's exactly noon."

"Thanks," said young Kingsley. "Lower away."

As they began to pay out the rope, the man closest to him said lightly: "Hurry back with that verdict of guilty."

From Kingsley, now lost to view in the dark air shaft, came the reply: "He's as innocent as we are."

One of the group on the roof took his hand from the rope long enough to tap his forehead. The others grinned their approval of this derisive gesture. They appeared to have little affection for their cocky young colleague, and less confidence in his judgment.

"Whoa!" warned one of them, a moment later. "That's low enough! There's the tape."

His fellows' glances, following his, came to rest on the black circlet round the rope which showed that Kingsley had arrived at his informal observation post outside the jury room window on the fourth floor.

The anchor man made the taut rope fast to a newly installed stanchion, and he and the others relaxed into comfortable attitudes, lighted cigarettes, and entered upon one of those feasts of cynicism and flows of criticism with which reporters, the world over, kill time.

Such introductory phrases as: "Here's the inside info on that;" and, "Here's the low-down on that;" kept recurring, followed by revelations which the red-faced deputy sheriff drank in through opened mouth and widened eyes.

But these recitals of "the real stuff the fat-heads on the desk won't let you print," pungent as they were, were not pungent enough to dispel the air of boredom with which the reporters were enveloped.

More than an hour after they had lowered into the air shaft the lean and lanky young man whose cocksureness irritated them the more because he looked less like one of themselves than like a poet or a student of divinity, they still were making confidential reports to one another on various jewels of truth which the fat-heads on the desk had chosen not to print.

Naturally, most of this truth which had been crushed to the copy readers' spike, never to rise again, had to do with the case whose chief figure, Fergus Barton, now was eating his lunch next door in the fortresslike county jail.

And, if what these reporters were saying about the case was true, it seemed extremely likely that, at no far distant day, Fergus Barton would walk up the thirteen steps that led to the

scaffold in the county jail and would there be hanged by the neck until he was dead.

While the reporters' cynical tongues were jesting at the unbelievable defense Barton had offered, and were jeering at their credulous colleagues who believed in it, their eyes were intent on the clothesline signal cord whose farther end was in the hand of the eavesdropper at the window of the jury room.

"What's the fool jury wasting all this time for?" demanded one of the watchers. "They should have found him guilty on the first ballot. The prosecution proved he had the motive, didn't it?"

"He'd had her life insured in his favor, hadn't he? He was tired of her, wasn't he? He wanted to get rid of her so's he could marry this new flame of his, didn't he?"

"The prosecution proved the opportunity. He had all kinds of chances to stick arsenic in that candy he gave her, didn't he? What more does a jury want?"

"An' him thirty, an' her fifty, if she was a day, an' this new one twenty-four," wheezed the red-faced deputy sheriff, his indignation playing havoc with his grammar. "I tell you, gents, th' only guys I've talked to that says it wasn't him that done it is him an' this pal of yours, Mr. Kingsley."

"No pal of ours," snorted one of the reporters. "Just a fresh young fellow that blew in here a couple of months ago from the Lord knows where, and bulled old Macklin into giving him a job. He's nobody's pal but his own."

The silence which followed this comment, a silence which plainly was one of approval, was broken by the deputy sheriff. This functionary, cocking a wise and watery eye at Kingsley's critic, asked with elaborate carelessness:

"Say, Bill, was it jus' before or jus' after Barton murdered ol' lady Briggs

that Mr. Kingsley showed up in this man's town?"

With one accord, the five pairs of reportorial eyes swung from the signal cord to fasten themselves upon his fiery face.

"Let's see," mused the reporter called Bill, his real interest only half hidden by his pretended indifference. When, after a moment of thought, he spoke again, even this pretended indifference had disappeared. "The cops and I pulled Barton out of bed at three o'clock on the morning of May 10," he said, slowly and significantly. "We took him down town, locked him up and gave him the third degree. It wasn't till just eight o'clock, after five hours of working him over, that we decided we couldn't get anything out of him."

"I was in the *Evening News* office at fifteen after eight, to write the lead for the noon edition. I was writing it when Kingsley drifted in to ask old man Macklin for a job. I'd never seen him before—"

"Neither had any of us," interrupted another, and added, with the ghost of a sneer: "Sold Macklin by telling him he'd worked in New York."

The deputy sheriff, palpably pleased by the direction the conversation had taken, gave it another push. "I dunno nuthin' about that," he rumbled, stretching ponderously, "but I know him an' Barton has been thick as thieves ever since. You boys know as well as me Barton ain't done no talkin' except to Kingsley an' th' lawyer Kingsley got to defend him. I tell you I know—"

"He's pulling the signal cord!" cut in the reporter called Bill, jumping to the rope. "The jury's found a verdict. Come on, boys, pull him up." As he and they pulled, Bill went on: "I'll bet any of you, three to two, they've found Barton guilty of murder in the first degree."

"Make it two to one an' I'll take five dollars' worth," puffed the deputy

sheriff, who was lending a hand with the rope. "I dunno all Kingsley's been doin'."

"You're on," Bill told him, as he and the others, with their faces toward the parapet, continued to pull away at the rope which was bringing upward the man who believed in the innocence of Fergus Barton. "One of us will be paying off in about a minute."

"One of us 'll be payin' off right now," puffed the deputy sheriff, less than a minute later. "Here's Mr. Kingsley!"

Kingsley, his lean, studious face set in hard lines, his eyes smoldering with suppressed excitement, scrambled over the parapet, kicking himself loose from the canvas cradle as he came.

Without a word to his colleagues, even without a glance in their direction, he started for the open trapdoor—the trapdoor which, as they all knew, connected with the ladder, at the lower end of which was the telephone that was being held open to the switch board in the office of the *Evening News*.

Excitedly, almost angrily, those he had ignored called after him: "What's the verdict?" "What did they give him?"

Unheeding, he went on until he had reached the trapdoor and set foot on the ladder.

"They gave him death," he shouted back to them. "The verdict is murder in the first degree. But he's innocent—and, by God, I'm going to prove it!"

As he dropped from their sight, the reporter called Bill turned to the deputy sheriff. "You owe me five bucks," he said briskly.

"Here it is," grumbled the loser, snapping open the nickel-plated clasp of a greasy pocket purse. "I'd give a lot more'n that to find out all that Fred Kingsley really knows about this case!"

"And I'd give something," said the reporter called Bill, his voice very se-

rious, "to find out all there is to know about Fred Kingsley!"

CHAPTER II

A SECRET AND THE ROPE



COOPS," they call them in some cities, "beats," in others, these achievements such as the one young Fred Kingsley had accomplished.

Sometimes the reporter responsible for them is rewarded with currency, but most often he gets kind words. Fred Kingsley got neither. And, if anything was needed to convince him he was unpopular in the *Evening News* office, the staff's silence would have done it.

For, after all—the question of ethics aside, and the *Evening News* was never excessively ethical—he had done a good job, a job for which he had furnished both the idea and the execution.

The *Evening News* extra, with its screamer head, "Barton Guilty," was on the streets several minutes before those of the two other afternoon papers, which had not discovered that the verdict was guilty until the jury had filed into the court room. Those several minutes spelled increased street sales for the *Evening News*.

At dusk that day, Kingsley, who had gone into the office to write the lead for the final sporting edition, and whose copy had been torn from his typewriter, take by take, by his silently hostile superior, Macklin, the city editor, stalked out of the unsympathetic atmosphere of the city room.

He held his head high, his face was untroubled, he twirled a jaunty cane; but, even reporters being human, he must have been far from happy.

Certainly, as to the Barton case, he was in the hopeless minority. The corridors of the Criminal Court Building had buzzed with approval of the jury's verdict; the same approbation was in the air in the office of the *Eve-*

ning News.

It was reflected by the newsboy from whom Kingsley stopped to buy the last editions of the rival papers, by the man from whom he bought a pocketful of cigars, by the girl who waited on him in the dairy lunch room where he had his dinner.

A few minutes after he left the lunch room he was sitting in the cheerless visitors' hall in the county jail, deep in talk with the man the jury had found guilty of the murder of Victoria Cresswell.

Young Kingsley did most of the talking. He had to, for the short, squat, thick-necked, wide-shouldered Fergus Barton, who sat across the stout oaken table, pulling stolidly at one of the cigars the reporter had given him, appeared to be in a daze from which he aroused himself, from time to time, only by the greatest effort.

"I never did it, I never did it," he then would mutter in a lifeless monotone.

Once he burst out with unaccustomed energy: "Do I look like a murderer?"

"Of course not," Kingsley lied.

The truth was that to the expert—nay, even to the casual eye, Barton looked like a man capable of almost any crime. Cold cruelty was in his thin, tight lips, pugnacity in his blocklike jaw, treachery in his small, beady eyes which were too closely set under a low brow.

He had no graces of manner, and the voice in which he said despairingly, "But they're going to hang me, just the same. They're going to hang an innocent man," was harsh and unpleasant.

"They're not going to hang you," Kingsley insisted. "All you've got to do is to sit tight and keep your mouth shut. We're going to get you a new trial. We—"

"Who's 'we'?" demanded Barton, suspiciously.

"Your lawyer and I."

"My lawyer's a fool," said Barton. "He should have let me go on the stand. If I'd gone on the stand I'd have been acquitted."

Young Kingsley flicked a disdainful cigarette. "You're cuckoo," he remarked bluntly. "With that rotten past you've had, and that rotten temper you've got now, you'd have been the best witness for the prosecution. You're lucky you didn't go on the stand."

"Lucky?" sneered the convicted man, his evil face distorted with sudden passion. "I'm going to be hung!"

"Say that again," exclaimed his visitor, his patience worn thin, "and I'll walk out on you and let them hang you! It's what they want to do. If they weren't so anxious to do it they wouldn't have lost their heads and made those boners that are going to get you a new trial. The record is full of reversible errors—"

"I don't know what they are—" began Barton, his tone more humble.

"You don't know much of anything!" broke in the reporter brutally. "But I know a thing or two. I know you didn't kill Victoria Cresswell. And, knowing that, I'll be damned if I'm going to let them hang you for a crime you didn't commit."

"And I know the Supreme Court's on the square. We're going up on appeal, and as soon as that court gets a peek at all the mistakes the prosecution made by being too anxious to convict you, they'll order a new trial."

"You talk about wanting to go on the stand! If you'd done it, the district attorney couldn't have called the jury's attention to the fact that you didn't, could he? But he did, didn't he? And that's one of the many times he overreached himself. If we didn't have a single other reversible error, we'd have that. And that will get you your new trial."

Tired and worried as he was, he did succeed in communicating some of his

confidence to the prisoner. So well did he succeed that when he arose to go, Barton, walking with him to the barred door, was smiling.

At the door they shook hands. And there the reporter asked casually: "Have you heard from Florence this afternoon?"

Instantly the smile on Barton's hard visage was wiped out, and to it succeeded a look of the most intense hatred.

"She's turned on me," he spat out, seizing Kingsley's arm in fierce frenzy. "I'll bet you, if I get a new trial, that baby-faced Florence Darrell will do her best to swear my life away!"

Kingsley, releasing himself from a grip that hurt, stared at him blankly. "Why, she's our best witness," he insisted. "She's always been true blue. It was only this morning, before court, that she came up to me in the corridor and whispered: 'We know Fergus is innocent, don't we? We know he'll be acquitted, don't we?'"

"Something's happened since this morning," said Fergus Barton darkly.

His only answer to Kingsley's impatient demand for details was the dogged reiteration of the phrase, "It's a secret between her and me."

At last the exasperated Kingsley broke out: "Secret, hell! You're in a fine position to begin holding out on me! I'm all that stands between you and the rope, and you know it! Are you going to tell me?"

His whole body stiffening, Barton closed his eyes. "You are the only friend I've got," he said, in a strained and unnatural voice, "but this secret is between her and me."

"I'll give you until noon to-morrow to come to your senses," said the reporter sternly. "I'll be back then. If you've made up your mind to lay all the cards on the table, I'll keep on helping you. If you've decided to stick to this mysterious stuff, I'll quit. And if I quit, they'll probably hang you."

His body still tensed, his eyes still

closed, the convicted man again muttered in that strained and unnatural voice: "They'll probably hang me."

Kingsley left him.

CHAPTER III

HARD-BOILED METHODS



N the street car which carried him from the county jail to the quiet little hotel where he had lived since his arrival in Midland City, two months before, Fred Kingsley occupied himself with the final sporting edition of the *Evening News*.

And before he had ridden a block he became conscious that the woman sitting next to him was stealing furtive glances at his newspaper.

Even had he been feeling well, this surreptitious reading over his shoulder would have been as annoying as it is to most men. But he was not feeling well. The strain of the long day's work, the chilling unfriendliness of his fellow workers, the disappointment caused by the unwelcome verdict, the still graver worry over Fergus Barton's inexplicable secretiveness, had got to his nerves.

These must have been frayed, indeed, else with an irritability such as he felt but seldom, he would not have thrust his half read newspaper into the hands of the woman who sat beside him, the woman at whom, as yet, he had not even looked.

It was not until she spoke to him that he turned his eyes in her direction. "Thank you," was all she said, but the deep, rich contralto voice in which she said it drew him like a magnet. Some time, somewhere, he had heard that singularly warm and alluring voice before.

Upon the instant his eyes met hers, he remembered both the time and the place. He could not be mistaken. This most attractive young woman beside him, this dark-haired, sultry-eyed

beauty, was Elaine Leffington, one of the twelve jurors who had found Fergus Barton guilty of the murder of Victoria Cresswell.

"Queen of the jury," the newspapers had called her, and Kingsley, who himself had written the catch phrase many times, now glowed with satisfaction at the recollection that it was he who invented it.

Never before had he seen her except at a distance. Only twice before had he heard her voice; once in the jury room this afternoon; once in the court room that morning, last week, when she had answered the questions put to her by the district attorney and by the counsel for the defense.

Now, as her cool impersonal gaze, in which there was no sign of recognition, told him she chose to regard him as a stranger, he withdrew his eyes. Staring moodily at the feet of the passengers across the aisle, he tried to decide whether Elaine Leffington really had forgotten she had seen him in the court room or whether she was only pretending she had.

His self-esteem gave him the solution. "It was no farther from the jury box to the reporters' table than it was from the reporters' table to the jury box," he said to himself. "If I saw her, she must have seen me. She's got some reason for not wanting to recognize me now."

Riding along beside her, he fell to wondering how a woman as intelligent as she appeared to be had arrived at the conclusion that the prosecution had proved its case against Barton.

"Those men on the jury were a lot of morons," he told himself, "but this Leffington girl doesn't look like a stupid. I'd hate to think she was stampered into voting 'Guilty' just because Barton didn't go on the stand to defend himself. It was his right to refuse to testify. And, whether he testified or whether he didn't, it was up to the prosecution to prove his guilt beyond a reasonable doubt."

Kingsley, firmly of the opinion that the prosecution had failed to do this, again bent his mind to the congenial task of picking flaws in the prosecution's theory of the crime, the theory the district attorney had outlined in his opening statement.

The flaws Kingsley found were so many that, before the car had traveled another block, he yielded to a sudden and irresistible impulse to speak to the woman beside him.

"Miss Leffington," he began, his intense earnestness making his voice unsteady, "I'm a friend of Fergus Barton. You can do me a favor—"

"I know who you are," she interposed, with more than a trace of resentment in her rich voice. "I know you're the reporter who's been trying to save the neck of a murderer. But I don't know why I should do you, or him, any favors."

"You believe in justice, don't you?" he jerked out, half angrily.

"I do," she flashed at him. "I believe in justice, and in courtesy—oh, and in a number of things which do not seem to interest you."

This rebuke stung him into silence, but only for a moment. "From the way you were looking over my shoulder, I thought you wanted the paper," he countered, in a half whisper back of which was resentment deeper than her own. "I guess you did, because you've still got it—"

"Here's your old paper," she said hastily, a flush on her lovely face, daggers of scorn in her lovely eyes.

If she thought he would not take it, she made a mistake; and, if she thought she had squelched him, she made another.

"Thanks," he said, in offhand fashion, as he shoved the crumpled copy of the *Evening News* into a pocket of the most fashionable and expensive overcoat worn by any of the *Evening News* staff. Leaning toward her, he went on bitterly:

"You believe in justice? You?

You're no better than those half-wits that were on the jury with you. You sat there spellbound while that wind-bag of a district attorney gave poor Barton a bad name.

"And after you and the rest of 'em had got drunk on the district attorney's eloquence, your emotions told you to hang Barton. I'd hate to feel like you're going to feel when you wake up."

"How dare you?" she exclaimed, her eyes furious.

"Don't talk like a book," he rebuked her, getting to his feet.

"You cad!" she flamed at him, close to tears.

"Another line out of the book," he flung at her brutally, as he moved away.

He did not see her begin to cry. But another passenger did—a sleek, trimly elegant young man across the aisle.

The next instant this excessively well dressed and scented champion of beauty in distress was bending over Miss Leffington.

"Is there anything I can do?" he wanted to know, his bold eyes close to her face.

He did not get his answer from the girl, who had shrunk away from him, but from Fred Kingsley, who upon hearing the new voice had stopped halfway to the door.

"There's something I can do," snapped Kingsley, his long stride carrying him to the side of the interloper.

The eyes of all the other passengers were on him as he unceremoniously thrust the perfumed volunteer back into his seat. "I can teach you to mind your own business," he said, with that cocksureness which his associates on the *Evening News* had found so hard to bear.

Neither so tall nor so heavy as the bold-eyed, thick-lipped cavalier he had put in his place, his confidence in himself not only crippled the heroic gesture of the walking perfume counter, but also extorted from the interested

Miss Leffington a sincere, even if involuntary, glance of gratitude.

Ignoring it, he again started for the door.

"Next corner," he nodded to the conductor.

When he swung himself to the pavement, he heard beside him the rich contralto voice of Elaine Leffington. "I get off here, too," she explained superfluously, and when he remained silent, she added: "I've been thinking about what you were telling me about Fergus Barton—"

"You didn't give me a chance to tell you much," he interrupted roughly, his eyes holding hers. "You were too busy calling me names."

While he was thus accusing her, he was guiding her footsteps to the curb.

"I didn't mean all I said," she murmured under her breath, "and neither did you."

His grumbled reply reflected neither surprise nor pleasure, yet he must have been pleased. For again one of his methods of news getting had vindicated itself. Had Elaine Leffington been a negative quantity—colorless, retiring, a human door mat—he would have tried to weasel himself into her confidence by flattering her to the skies.

Summed up in a brief phrase, that was his system—"Always treat 'em as they're not used to being treated."

But this radiant beauty, whose garments bespoke prosperity, whose sureness of manner was that of one accustomed to homage, was anything except negative.

The experienced Kingsley, shrewd enough to know that this well-bred and gentle-mannered young person was not used to being "roughed," as he called it, had been hard-boiled enough to rough her.

He began to glimpse the fullness of his reward when, reaching the sidewalk, Miss Leffington, friendliness in her frank and fearless eyes, murmured: "You know, I'm not a juror

any more, I'm just a human being. Now, what was it you say I didn't give you a chance to tell me in the car?"

"You wouldn't be interested," he answered stiffly.

"Of course I would," she insisted, just as he had expected she would.

Even this assurance on her part did not soften him immediately. Experience had taught him that, on these fishing expeditions, an appearance of sustained indifference by the fisher often made the fish jump into the boat of its own free will.

He tried again to put her in the wrong, figuring she would continue to fight hard to put herself in the right. "You're too self-centered to be honestly interested in an unfortunate devil like Barton," he told her.

The angry light that leaped into her fine eyes showed him he had figured wrong. And when she spoke, biting off her words with chilling emphasis, he knew that, this time, his system had failed because he had committed the not uncommon error of not leaving well enough alone, of not knowing when to quit.

"Good evening, Mr. Kingsley," said she. "You see, I know your name. And I know something else about you. I know that you are a very disagreeable young man."

Steeling himself to bear with outward calmness her parting glance of disdain, a glance like that which an offended princess might have shot at him, he lifted his hat, and said cheerily, "Good evening, Miss Leffington. I knew I was right about you," and shouldered his way into the passing throng.

At the next corner he still was talking to himself. "Threw it away by unselling her after I'd had her sold," he was muttering. "Got to get her back. I can reach her father through her. If I can line up his money and influence for Barton, Barton 'll get a square deal. The poor guy needs it. And E. T. Leffington, the traction

magnate, and Miss Elaine Leffington, the social settlement worker, ought to carry enough guns in this town to see that he gets it."

CHAPTER IV

JUST ANOTHER BLONDE!



IN the face of all that had happened to him that day, only a brash young man, with a great deal of confidence in himself, could have gone to bed that night without feeling at least a twinge of self-pity or self-condemnation.

Fortunately for Fred Kingsley, these soul-corroding emotions had never made much headway against his invincible optimism, his unconquerable conviction that in the end everything would come out all right.

But, this night, his serenity was a triumph of hope over experience.

Undressing in his bleak room in the third-rate hotel which had been his only home since his arrival in Midland City, he wearily tried to fight off an attack of loneliness by concentrating his mind upon the ways and means to be used in keeping Fergus Barton's thick neck from the noose.

"If you think you've got troubles, just take a slant at the other guy's," he grinned at his reflection in the wavy mirror over his scarred dressing table. "You're running 'way behind your ticket on the *News*, you've fumbled this Leffington party, it's almost a week until pay day, and it 'll seem like a month because you *would* keep drawing to inside straights.

"But, you lucky sucker, you haven't got a little Florence Darrell in your life. If that little spitfire cutie has gone hostile Indian on Barton, it's going to make my job harder. But if she's gone hostile, why?"

Propped up in bed, staring at the faded green wall, through the smoke of cigarettes, lighted one from another, Kingsley set his mind to work upon

its last task of the long, hard day—the solution of the mystery of Fergus Barton's falling out with the baby-faced, bobbed-haired Florence Darrell, the dancing instructor.

"Florence, the motive," the district attorney had called this lisping, innocent-eyed blonde.

Patiently, bit by bit, the tired Kingsley mentally added up all the facts he knew about Fergus Barton, those he knew about Florence Darrell, those he knew about the fifty-year-old Victoria Cresswell, who had been Barton's employer and benefactor—some said his *fiancée*—and who now was in her grave, to which, according to the verdict brought in by Elaine Leffington and eleven others, arsenic administered by Barton had sent her.

Yet, try as he would to keep his mind on the events that led to the arrest and indictment of Barton, the mature Miss Cresswell's rental agent, man of business and general factotum, there constantly recurred to him the disturbing recollection of what Barton had said in the county jail: "I'll bet you, if I do get a new trial, that baby-faced Florence Darrell will swear my life away."

And, on the heels of that memory, always the unanswerable question, "Why?"

As he pondered over this new mystery, he suddenly was startled by the sharp summons of the telephone. Leaping from his bed to answer it, there flashed into his mind a premonition that the call was a call of importance.

He was right.

"Fred?" lisped a tinkly voice he knew very well. "Fred, this is Florence. I've got to see you right away."

Florence Darrell, the young, innocent-eyed, fluffy-haired dancing instructor! Florence Darrell, the district attorney's motive!

Even over the telephone she seemed to be nestling against him, clinging to his arm, looking up into his eyes, helplessly, appealingly. It was her way.

The first time she met a man she called him by his first name. The second time she told him that thoughts of him had disturbed her since their meeting. The third time—

But Kingsley always had held the fluttering little scatterbrain at arm's length. "I don't think she means any harm," he had told himself. "I'm damned sure I don't. To me, she's just another blonde."

CHAPTER V

DOWN AN ALLEYWAY



ABOUT three-quarters of an hour after Kingsley hung up the telephone, he was pressing the button beside the door of an apartment in the flashy Laguna Arms.

In his ears, as he had entered the lobby, which was decked out with potted palms and crimson-shaded floor lamps, was the sound of a far-off clock, tolling the hour of midnight.

While waiting for the effervescent Miss Darrell to answer his ring, which she was unaccountably long in doing, some obscure impulse threw the reporter's thoughts back to the night of his first meeting with her.

Sharply etched in his memory were the details of that encounter. The place where it had occurred was the gloomy death chamber in which the iron-willed, masculine-faced Victoria Cresswell lost one of the very few fights she had lost in her selfish, dominating life—her fight with death.

And the time when this first meeting between Kingsley and Florence Darrell had occurred was as unforgettable as the place, for they met a few minutes after the detectives' close search of the room had brought to light the document that became Fergus Barton's death warrant—the last will and testament of Victoria Cresswell.

This will, which bequeathed to her business manager all the property, real and personal, of which she died pos-

sessed, was found in a woman's hatbox on a shelf in Miss Cresswell's dressing room.

With it was a photograph of the scrawny and singularly unattractive Miss Cresswell, and a photograph of the squat and equally unattractive Fergus Barton. And under the hatbox had been found a neatly tied packet of letters which Fergus Barton had written to his employer, telling her about rentals, taxes, improvements; telling her, also, how much he loved her.

These discoveries had been made on the day that Fred Kingsley, fresh from New York—very fresh, said the Midland City reporters—joined the staff of the *Evening News*. And that was the day after that on which the coroner had found arsenic in the body of Victoria Cresswell.

Kingsley, now snapping impatient fingers outside Florence Darrell's gaudily painted door, recreated in his mind's eye the scene he had witnessed in the severely old-fashioned room where the masculine-looking Miss Cresswell, having lost the love of Fergus Barton, also had lost her life.

Again he saw the triumphant detectives gloating over the will, the photographs, and the letters; mostly over the will which, less than a week old, and written in Miss Cresswell's firm handwriting, gave to the indomitable woman's faithless lover an estate valued at almost one hundred thousand dollars.

"Didn't Barton tell you he was going to be rich?" one of these detectives had thundered at Florence Darrell. "Didn't he tell you the old woman had made a new will in his favor? Didn't he tell you he was the beneficiary of her new life insurance policies?"

And to this triple-barreled question, Florence Darrell, her fresh young beauty the only bright spot in the funereal, tragedy-haunted room, had blithely answered: "No."

In that room, to which detectives had taken her from this very Laguna

Arms, and on the witness stand later, she had told the same story. It boiled down to this:

She never had met Miss Cresswell. She never even had heard of her before she had read in the papers the account of her mysterious death. She had known Barton only slightly, having met him but three or four times.

These innocent meetings had occurred at the Palais de Danse, where she was employed as an instructor. So far as she knew, he was a perfect gentleman. And, so far as she herself was concerned, she was careful of her reputation to such an extent that never would she receive men visitors in her apartment in the Laguna Arms.

Yes, the Laguna Arms was next door to the Palais de Danse. That was why she lived there. It was so convenient and so respectable. Of course she was self-supporting. She would not dream of accepting anything from a gentleman friend. To begin with, she did not have any gentlemen friends. She was so busy she had little time to waste on men. Anyway, she did not care much for men.

Such had been her story, and she had stuck to it.

That the district attorney had not believed it was not her fault. She had made it strong enough to be believed. Yet, in the face of it, the district attorney had gone ahead with his theory. This was that Fergus Barton, having known Victoria Cresswell for more than six years and Florence Darrell less than six weeks, had murdered the older woman that he might get possession of her property to share with the younger.

The jury, which had apparently doubted the truth of some parts of Florence Darrell's story, would have been justified in doubting the truth of some more had they chanced to see the warm, even if belated, welcome which that alluring little person, with the soft eyes and the moist lips, extended to the reporter who had come at her call.

True, she might not have cared for men in general. But anybody who heard her lisp her greeting to the frowning young man, whose right hand she had captured in both of hers, would have decided that Florence Darrell liked one man in particular.

"What's the big idea of keeping me parked in the hall?" demanded this one man, softening the challenge with a smile to whose friendliness she responded by cuddling closer to him.

"You bad boy," she cooed, caressing his arm, "I've been dolling up for you, and you haven't even noticed my new frock."

He noticed it now,—what there was of it—and spoke the piece he knew was expected of him. It pleased her, as did the fact that he made himself very much at home—too much at home, according to more formal standards—taking the most comfortable of the overstuffed chairs in her overstuffed living room, helping himself to cigarettes from her musical cigarette box, slipping his arm around her slim and silken waist when she perched herself upon the arm of his chair to light a cigarette from his.

Within the circle of his arm, she relaxed like a tired child.

"What's on the old mind?" he murmured, his comradely voice wooing her confidence.

"Plenty," she sighed.

After a long pause, he queried: "I suppose you're worried about Barton?"

With no pause at all, she answered him. "I am like hell!" she exclaimed, all her lassitude gone. "I'm worried about myself. That's why I sent for you. Listen, Fred, and listen hard. I'm going to tell you something I've never told you, or anybody, before."

When she had finished he remained silent for several minutes, his face grave.

"If you go through with this," he said at last, turning to look into her face, whose prettiness had hardened

into a mask of resolution, "Barton's sunk—and you know it."

"And what do I care?" she demanded, springing to her feet. "I've got myself to look out for," she went on breathlessly. "I've stood all I'm going to stand for from him. Just as I've been telling you, I'm through with that weakling who's been hiding behind my skirts. I've done my last lying for him. After this, if they ask me whether we were sweethearts, I'll tell 'em the truth. I'll tell 'em we were."

"And it don't make a bit of difference to me that my telling 'em the truth will cinch the prosecution's theory that I was Barton's reason for killing the old gal. From now on, I'm looking out for myself."

Arising wearily, the reporter faced her. "You've given me the surprise of my life," he said. "I've honestly believed the stuff I've been writing about you and Barton, that you were mere acquaintances, and so on. What you've told me just now—"

"I had to tell you," she broke in, a pleading hand on his arm. "You've been great to me. I couldn't go on making a sucker out of you. I—"

"How do I know you aren't doing it now?" he wanted to know, his voice suspicious. "How do I know you aren't trying to use me to get something out of Barton?"

She laughed mirthlessly. "Listen, Fred," she said, speaking slowly and impressively. "I've got everything out of Barton that I can get. Everything. I've got it down in black and white—over his own signature."

Her look of sly triumph brought from Kingsley only the puzzled exclamation: "You've got what down in black and white?"

"His will," she answered over her shoulder, from where she stood preening herself in front of a pier glass. "He leaves me everything. But, of course, I don't get it till he's dead."

"And you went to the jail this afternoon and quarreled with him?"

"I went to the jail and told him where he got off," she corrected. "It was he that quarreled with me."

Kingsley, grabbing her wrist, whirled her round from the mirror in which she was admiring herself. "Tell me," he demanded, his voice tense, "did Barton kill Victoria Cresswell?"

"I don't know," she wavered, avoiding his gaze.

"You've always sworn he didn't," he reminded her.

"I don't know," she repeated.

"You do know I think he's innocent, don't you? You do know I'm trying to get him a new trial, don't you?"

"You're hurting my wrist," she complained, pulling away from him. "Fred," she went on, her hands behind her back, her innocent eyes fixed on him, "I tell you I won't be a bit of good to you on a new trial."

"You're not so anxious to convict him that you'd perjure yourself?"

"I don't care what becomes of him," she said defiantly. "And if you don't think I perjured myself for him on the first trial, you're crazy. Come here."

The puzzled Kingsley followed her from the gayly decorated living room into a dark hallway which led to the rear of the apartment.

"Look out of that window," she ordered, pointing to a pane of glass set in the wall of the corridor. "Tell me what you see."

"Nothing but an alley," he answered.

"Nothing but an alley," she mocked, pressing against him in the darkness. "Well, let me tell you you're looking at a very important alley."

This cryptic statement she proceeded to explain in a breathless voice which bubbled with merriment as if the explanation was a rare jest which she enjoyed to the full. But Kingsley did not share her appreciation of it.

"So that's where you used to keep Barton waiting till you were through work at the Palais de Danse!" he snorted. "It's a wonder to me his love

didn't grow cold. And you say this drunken janitor of the dance hall has seen you and Barton coming over here dozens of times?"

"Dozens and dozens of times this old guy, Leffington, has seen us," she boasted. "If the district attorney was as smart as he thinks he is, he'd have found it out long ago."

"He doesn't know it yet—" Kingsley began, his eyes on the alley, his mind on the drunken janitor whose name was the same as that of Elaine Leffington.

But he did not complete the sentence. Florence Darrell had interrupted him. "There's old Stew Leffington now," she said, surprise in her tone. "See him down there at the mouth of the alley? And darned if he ain't talking to a dame!"

His interest quickened by hers, Kingsley turned his gaze in the direction she had indicated. It fell upon a pool of light under an arc lamp at the mouth of the alley, and upon the two figures who stood close together in that pool, one the figure of the shabby, stoop-shouldered janitor, the other that of Elaine Leffington.

In an instant Kingsley was back in the living room. In another he had slipped into his overcoat.

"I'm glad you sent for me," he told Florence Darrell, his hand on the door-knob. "I'll remember all you've said, and I'll call you up later."

"I won't be here!" she called after him warningly.

Maybe he did not hear her. But, even if he did, he kept on going.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAN WHO KNEW MISS CRESSWELL



IT was one o'clock in the morning when Fred Kingsley left Florence Darrell's apartment. It was seven o'clock when he walked heavily into the city room of the *Evening News*.

He looked seedy, and he felt worse, for he had been too busy to sleep. A cold bath had helped him a little, hot black coffee, heavily sugared—his favorite pick-me-up—had helped him a little more, but his nerves were still ragged, and he was very tired.

"Now, about the Barton case—" he began wearily, addressing himself to his city editor, the frowzy, shirt-sleeved Macklin, who was fingering clippings at his desk.

"About this Barton case," interrupted Macklin, transferring his fingers from the clippings to his unshaven chin and staring hard at Kingsley, "all I've got to say is I've taken you off it. In fact, to make a long story short, I've taken you off the *Evening News*."

He hurried into his reasons, which began with the hackneyed, "I've been ordered to cut my department to the bone, and, as you're the last man on, naturally you're the first to go," and ended with the forthright declaration:

"The big boss doesn't like the way you've gone wrong on the Barton case. He says you've shown rotten judgment. He doesn't like the way you've antagonized the district attorney's office. He doesn't—"

"You can chop it off there," broke in Kingsley, with a weary shrug of his shoulders. "This isn't the first time I've been fired. I'm not going to burst into tears. But I am going to tell you you're firing more than me. You're firing the solution of the Barton case."

"My boy, the jury has solved that case," pronounced Macklin, extending his hand. "Good luck to you. You'll find an extra week's salary at the cashier's window."

"I've damned well earned it," Kingsley told him, as they shook hands. "Are you sure you don't want to hear my new theory of the Barton case?"

"Dead sure," Macklin grinned, picking up his clippings. "I've got one of my own. Mine is that Barton had better begin to say his prayers."

Three hours later Kingsley telephoned to the man who had discharged him.

"I've landed a job on the *Evening Express*," he reported. "But before I go to work, I think it's only square to say that while I was still on the *News* I dug up some stuff about the Barton case you might like to have."

"If you've got Barton's confession, I could use it," laughed the city editor. "You haven't? Well, the *Express* is welcome to anything else you've got. Thanks for calling me up."

"You're welcome," Kingsley assured him, a note of relief emerging from his tired voice. "And here's an add to my farewell speech. This is the time for all good *News* men to begin to say their prayers."

The only effect this portentous utterance had upon the city editor was to cause him to remark to his assistant as he replaced his desk telephone on the hook: "The lunatic asylum that calls itself the *Express* has got another inmate—Kingsley, the Barton bug, and his talking jag."

Macklin's assistant did not let the fact that he had borrowed five dollars from the Barton bug, and had forgotten to pay it back, prevent him from smirking his appreciation.

But there was no smile on the face of the hard-driven Kingsley as the noon sun shone down upon him mounting the marble steps that led to a grille door upon which was a modest nameplate inscribed "E. T. Leffington."

His telephone call from the *Evening Express* office to this turreted mansion, under whose sculptured roof dwelt the traction magnate and his motherless daughter, had brought word that Miss Leffington would receive him at twelve.

Now, nearing the portal of this austere house in one of whose closets he knew there was a family skeleton, his thoughts were shadowed by the memory of two other visits he had made that morning—two visits not preceded by the formality of a telephone request.

At the county jail, Fergus Barton, still protesting his innocence, had tried to revenge himself for Florence Darrell's desertion of him by storming that she might have poisoned Victoria Cresswell.

In a shabby lodging house around the corner from the Palais de Danse, Stew Leffington, black sheep son of the traction king, aroused from boozy slumber, had hinted mysteriously at a friendship between him and the wealthy Victoria Cresswell, and had denied point-blank that he had talked to his sister for more than a year.

Kingsley, who had seen him talking to her only a few hours before, and who, undetected by her, had shadowed her to her home, had made a third informal visit. But to no avail.

Florence Darrell had fled.

"Went away this morning with one of the young gentlemen that's been comin' here to see her," the Filipino house boy told him. "Took steamer trunk. Took bag. Took 'nother bag."

"If they hang Barton," reflected the tired-eyed Kingsley, waiting for his ring of the Leffington bell to be answered, "that clinging vine, Florence, will inherit everything he's inherited from Victoria Cresswell. Her current young gentleman is probably figuring on that. I wonder what he'll think when he finds out they aren't going to hang Barton!"

A moment or two later, in the cool, vague dimness of the drawing-room, Kingsley was saying: "It takes a woman to catch a woman. That's why I'm asking you to work on the Barton case with me. You say you believe in justice. Here's a chance to prove it."

"There's no woman to catch," she scoffed. "Besides, I don't like your tone," she went on, rebuke in her rich voice. "You talk as if you have a right to tell me what to do."

"I have," he said, undaunted. "Haven't I a right to expect you to help me when I'm trying to protect your brother?"

Wide-eyed, her breath coming fast, she stared at him. "What do you know about my brother?" she gasped.

"Enough," he replied, steeling himself to ignore her pitifully weak attempt at bravado.

Her eyes searched his. "If you only understood—" she began, then broke off to begin again: "Tell me what you know. I think I can trust you."

"I've got to trust you," said he, with a briskness of manner that brought her from the verge of tears. "I need you to save Barton's neck. I want you to make your brother tell me the truth about Barton and—"

"That Darrell woman?" she cut in.

"Victoria Cresswell," he said, and plunged into his reasons for wanting to know all that he thought Miss Leffington's brother could tell. Again Miss Leffington interrupted him.

"My brother never comes here," she said. "But, once in awhile, I go to see him. I went last night because, after I left you, I got to thinking that there was a chance, a very slight one, perhaps, but still a chance, that the truth about Victoria Cresswell's death was not brought out in the court room."

"I know where my brother will be this afternoon. I suggest we go there."

"Where?"

"He'll be at the Cresswell house at one o'clock."

"It's a long way from here," Kingsley fretted, rising. "I don't know whether we can make it."

"I do!" she cried, with sudden decision. "We'll take my car."

CHAPTER VII

THE UNGALLANT GALLANT



NOT for a long, long time will Kingsley forget that drive; and not until the day of his death will he forget what came of it.

Cool and capable at the wheel, the lovely Elaine Leffington,

bareheaded, engulfed in an immense driving coat of vivid checks, turned to him as the long, sleek roadster drew away from the Leffington garage, which looked like one of the châteaux Kingsley had seen in rainy France during his days with the A. E. F.

"You watch the speedometer," she smiled. "I'll watch the road. Don't let me go more than fifty-five—or sixty."

If, during the mad drive to the Cresswell house on the farther side of town, the intently silent young woman at his side exceeded the limit she had set, Kingsley did not tell her so. So warmed was he by this new spirit of understanding which had sprung into being between them that he hesitated to break the spell by speech of any kind.

"No use telling her I saw her talking to her brother last night," he reflected, as the car gallantly took a dangerous curve. "No use telling her I've got a hunch that her brother may have the key to the whole mystery. No use telling her anything—until we find how that brother's going to stand up under the gun."

Not until the breath-taking trip ended with the car sliding to a standstill in front of the tree-environed, rambling, old-fashioned dwelling where Victoria Cresswell had died, did Kingsley break the silence which had seemed to be a bond between him and the girl whom the papers had labeled the Queen of the Jury.

"I just saw a curtain move at a window on the second floor," he said. "The window in the room Miss Cresswell used for an office."

The girl's eyes, smiling no longer, met his, unafraid, but she could not repress a little shiver as she answered: "That's the room next to the one where her body was found, isn't it?"

Without waiting for a reply, she led the way to the vine-covered front porch. "My brother may be here already," she tossed over her shoulder.

"I told you, didn't I, that he has a key to the house?"

She had told him nothing of the sort, but Kingsley did not say so.

It was not her brother who answered the summons of the old-fashioned iron door knocker. It was Florence Darrell.

Trim and trig from her modish little toque to her patent leathers, she coolly inspected Kingsley and his companion. "Hello, Fred," she murmured blandly, "who's your friend?"

The uncomfortable Kingsley, standing between the girl he knew had liked him, and the girl he knew he liked, introduced them.

"I know you now," Florence Darrell gushed to Elaine Leffington, whose great dark eyes were pools of unspoken distrust. "I seen you on the jury when I was testifying. I didn't know you knew my little boy friend. I—"

"Here's somebody *you* know," the fuming boy friend hastily interrupted, nodding toward a shabby, shambling figure which had come into sight around the corner of the house.

"Good old Stew!" cried Florence Darrell. "Come here, Stew, an' meet a coupla friends of mine."

His alcohol-shaken nerves on edge, Stewart Leffington came shakily on, but not until he had reached the steps leading to the porch did he raise his bloodshot eyes.

"Elaine!" he jerked out, astonished, his drunkard's mouth, drooping at the corners, working convulsively.

"My Gawd!" cried Florence Darrell, in blank dismay. "If I'd known you two was acquainted!"

She seemed to be seized by sudden, inexplicable panic. "Harry!" she shrieked. "Come here, quick!"

The tense silence which followed this appeal to an unseen Harry was broken by the smooth, unruffled tones of Elaine Leffington. "Acquainted?" she said, her eyes holding those of the frightened dancing instructor. "Stewart Leffington is my brother."

Whereupon Stewart Leffington spoke for himself. "Flo," said he familiarly to Florence Darrell, "I'd like to know two things. I'd like to know what all you people are holding a convention here for, and I'd like to know who this Harry is, and what right he's got—"

Ignoring him, to address herself to Kingsley and the bareheaded, brave-eyed girl who stood beside him, Florence Darrell, whose alert gaze had been buried in the vague recesses of the house, only dimly visible through the open front door, yelped joyously: "Here's Harry!"

But, before the others saw him, they heard his voice. "Florence, Florence!" he was calling tremulously. "Is there anything I can do?"

The next instant, when, sleek, trimly elegant, bold-eyed, and highly scented, the young man called Harry appeared upon the threshold, he answered his own question. For all that he could do, at least all that he did do, was to shrink back against the door jamb as if in deadly fear that Fred Kingsley was about to attack him.

While Florence Darrell lashed the craven with her eyes, Kingsley said to the amused Miss Leffington: "This hero's got only one speech. Remember, he said the same thing to you in the street car?"

Thrilled by her softly spoken answer, "I remember what you did to him in the street car," Kingsley strode to the open door.

"Everybody inside, please," said he, his hand on the knob.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HAND OF THE DEAD



CURTAINED and shuttered, the sunless rooms in the house of death, filled with heavy pieces of furniture whose grotesque forms and shapes were exaggerated by the white sheets which covered

them, were in themselves sufficiently depressing.

Tiptoeing through them, shepherded by Kingsley, whose manner had become very grave, the sheepish Harry, the wondering Florence Darrell, the nervous Stewart Leffington, even the serene, though deeply interested Elaine Leffington seemed to be subtly affected by the tense atmosphere, electric with possibilities.

Kingsley's keen eye, traveling over the group gathered in the vast, high-ceilinged room where Victoria Cresswell had died, passed over Elaine Leffington, who was deep in a whispered conversation with her brother, and came to rest upon the troubled face of Florence Darrell.

That face became more troubled when Kingsley, glancing at his wrist watch, said crisply: "Ladies and gentlemen, my paper goes to press in less than an hour. When it goes to press it's going to carry the true story of the Barton case. And I'm going to get that story right now. Stewart Leffington, come here!"

Pausing only to whisper hoarsely to his sister: "If you say tell him, I'll tell him," and to receive her even-toned answer: "Tell him the truth," Leffington followed Fred Kingsley into the adjoining room, the room which Miss Cresswell had used as an office.

Silence descended upon those they left behind. It was broken by Florence Darrell, who, half wheedling, half defiant, edged close to Leffington's sister to say:

"That fellow Kingsley's a bulldozer, that's what he is. If I was you I'd bust in there an' make him quit givin' my brother the third degree. Stew told me—"

"Stewart told me," frowned Elaine Leffington, "that you and this man here got into this house with a key you borrowed from him." Biting her lip, she paused, but went on:

"If Stewart hadn't been drinking he wouldn't have given you the key.

If he hadn't been drinking he wouldn't have told you there was something in this house that it would be to your advantage to find. That's why you and this man came here, isn't it, to find that something?"

Florence Darrell's eyes, innocent no longer, but sick with sudden panic, darted from the accusing Miss Leffington to Harry, now a picture of frightened helplessness, and from him to the closed door.

The next instant she was beating her fists upon that door, and calling desperately: "Stew, Stew, don't tell him a thing! Remember what I promised you! I'll make good. Only, don't tell him a thing!"

The door opened. Kingsley came out with Stewart Leffington behind him.

"You're too late," announced Kingsley in a quiet voice. "He's told me everything. I've always known Fergus Barton did not kill Victoria Cresswell. But until a minute ago I did not know who did. Ladies and gentlemen, you will find the full story of the case in the *Evening Express* tonight."

In a voice as quiet as his own, Elaine Leffington said:

"If you like, Mr. Kingsley, I'll drive you to the office."

The scornful voice of Florence Darrell cut across his thanks. "It's all a bluff!" she shrilled. "Stew ain't sayin' a word. Harry, this high-an'-mighty Mr. Fred Kingsley didn't get a thing out of Stew."

Halfway to the outer door, Kingsley, with Elaine Leffington, who was beside him, came to a halt.

"Stewart," said he, his tone triumphant, "tell this lady and gentleman what I got out of you."

With the eyes of all of them upon him, Stewart Leffington obeyed Kingsley's order.

"Nothing but the truth!" he cried, his voice vibrating with sincerity. "I

told Mr. Kingsley about seeing Miss Cresswell cry and carry on when she found out that Barton had fallen in love with you, Flo. And I told him how she came to write that letter you know about, the one you came here to get, the one that said she was going to kill herself—"

"The one I've got in my pocket," said Kingsley.

"And I told him something else, Flo," cried Leffington. "Something I never told you. I told him about the second will she made—the one that took her money away from Barton and gave it to charity."

"The will I've got in my pocket," said Kingsley.

"And I told him I knew she had arsenic in the house, because she'd got me to buy it for her. And I told him she said other people had committed suicide for love, but she was going to kill herself for hate. She hated Barton and she hated you."

Florence Darrell, her face white as paper, raised her voice in an outburst of fury.

"But the old fool's insurance will go to Fergus Barton," she said. "Her hate can't stop that!"

Kingsley spoke. "Her hate has stopped that," he said. "Every one of those policies carried a suicide clause. If Miss Cresswell killed herself within a year after they were issued, the companies did not have to pay. And she waited until the last day the suicide clauses were in effect. Nobody will get a cent from her insurance policies."

And nobody knows what else Fred Kingsley might have said had not Elaine Leffington gently laid her hand on his arm.

"We'd better hurry to your office," she whispered.

"Let's go!" he whispered back. "The new *Express* reporter 'll watch the speedometer. The Queen of the Jury'll watch the road."

THE END

LOOKING THRU MUNSEY'S

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